SHORT STORIES

No. 765.] Week ending August 29th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

In spite of the fearful torture, she held her wrists to the gas jet till the cords were burnt through.

(An Incident from the Thrilling Story, "Gwendolen's Burglars." See inside.)

Kaputine is not a single dangerous drug, such as has been condemned by the Medical Press, but is composed of several approved ingredients having the full confidence of the Medical profession. The medical paper "Health," recommends

Kaputine

THE SAFE REMEDY FOR

Headache,

Toothache & Neuralgia.

Cures in Ten Minutes.

Safely, surely and without bad after effects.

Packets of 18 doses 1/1; Samples 1d. each

Write to KAPUTINE, Huddersfield, for Samples Free. Kindly mention this paper.

TO CURE SICK HEADACHE.

Sick headache means an overtaxed stomach and a derangement of the digestive organs.

BEECHAM'S PILLS

have proved themselves a boon for removing that distressed feeling and discomfort. A dose will remove the immediate cause, and if repeated for a few days will enable your system to work normally.

Sold everywhere in Boxes, price 1/1½ (56 Pills) and 2/9 (168 Pills).

THE 5-MINUTES PAIN CURE FREE.

LINEEL LINIMENT is a very valuable discovery. It does not merely give relief, but it ABSOLUTELY STOPS, in **Five Minutes**, all aches and pains of a nervous or muscular character, such as Rheumatism, Neuralgia, Lumbago, Sciatica, Gout, Headache, Faceache, Toothache, Tic, Sprains, Bruises, Cramp, Stiffness, &c. To prove this you are not asked to buy it. Send postcard (mentioning this paper) for free bottle, carriage paid. Lineel Liniment acts electrically upon the nerve tissues, and is a discovery of the celebrated Professor Loeb and Dr Matthews, see *Daily Mail*, May 25th, 1903. THE LINEEL CO. LTD, 16 Bevis Marks, London, E.C.

SULPHOLINE LOTION

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

SHILLING BOTTLES.

REAL HEALTH.

It's always a pleasure to meet a woman with a lovely complexion and bright spirits. But you cannot enjoy the best of health unless your system is in faultless order—every organ doing its appointed work and doing it regularly and well

TOWLE'S PILLS

have brought health to thousands of ailing women the wide world over, by relieving distressing complaints, and giving tone to the system generally. Avoid injurious imitations.

In Boxes, 1/1½, 2/9 and 4/6.

The 2/9 boxes contain three times the quantity of the 1/1½ size.)

of all Chemists, or Post Free on receipt of 15, 34, or 56 penny stamps or P.O.O. from the Sole Proprietors,

E. T. TOWLE & Co., Nottingham, Eng.

SONGS COPIED.

Legibly (as print, 5d. page; transposed correctly 6d. page. MRS. CONYERS, Morchard Bishop, Devon. Recommended by the Marchioness of Waterford, Lady Arthur Hill, Miss Ellen Terry, etc.

PUNCTURE

A Holiday Spoilt Is Pleasure Lost.

Thousands of Cyclists ride in fear of Punctures. WHY FEAR! when the National Puncture Preventer will prevent all Punctures without any Reduction of Speed.

Hundreds of Testimonials! Phenomenal Success!

Thousands in daily use. The only

PREVENTER

on the Market which guarantees to prevent all punctures or refund the money. Average weight, 1oz.

Price **2/-** single; **3/6** PER PAIR

When ordering state size of wheels.

Sole Patentees and Inventors:

THE NATIONAL CYCLE MANUFACTURING CO.,

27 & 28 King William Street, London, E.C.

Our £5 5s. Cycles have a world-wide reputation. Send for List.

PUNCTURE PUNCTURE PUNCTURE

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*"

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.**, Sole Proprietor

66 Finsbury Pavement, London.

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 57 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½ stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 23lb., and I am cured." Countess Furstenberg, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well." Mrs. Crossley, of Ross Hill, Torver, Coniston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

DO YOU WANT A GOOD CYCLE?

Write for my Lists. I deal only in the **Best Coventry made Cycles**, and by contracting for thousands annually, I **BUY CHEAPLY** and **SELL CHEAPLY.**

Premiers, Rovers Coventry Challenge, Triumphs, Swifts, Humbers, Centaurs, Raglans, Singers, etc.

The QUALITY is there. Get my prices, save money and ensure satisfaction.

A High-Grade **COVENTRY CYCLE** for **£6-0-0.**

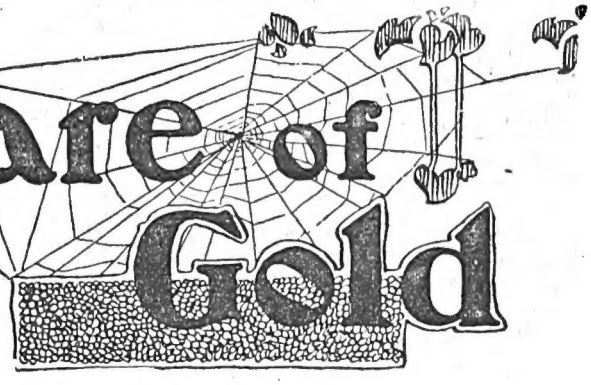
Two Years' Guarantee. Easy Payments without publicity. Cycle sent on receipt of first payment. **EDWARD O'BRIEN**, The World's Largest Cycle Dealer, **COVENTRY.**

SHORT STORIES

No. 765.] Week Ending August 29th, 1903. [One Penny.

NEW SERIAL STORY. **START TO-DAY.**

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

BEGIN READING HERE.

George Geldart, the rich City merchant, awakens to find that he is lying in a coffin, wrapped in grave clothes. Fearful lest he may lose consciousness again before he properly realises his surroundings, he clambers out of the sexagon.

There are voices!—those of a man and woman. Moving by instinct, he flings aside a wardrobe door and hides within. It is his son Eric, and his adopted daughter Clare talking. From their conversation he learns that his younger son, Ronald, has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

A tap at the door! Geldart hears the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she goes from the room, and presently he hears another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, his business partner, whom he has so often befriended.

It then transpires that Eric Geldart and Blagdon have conspired to end the life of the former's father. Eric demands a price from Blagdon for recovering some of the latter's promissory notes from his father's possession—old Geldart had noticed their disappearance, and thought that he had been robbed of them by Ronald. Blagdon promises that Eric shall have his price, then they leave the room.

Geldart slips swiftly out of the wardrobe, and, taking with him various articles, deposits them in the coffin, putting the lid back in its place. Then the undertaker's men come in and screw it down.

No sooner is this done than Ronald enters the room, and his father hears him bemoaning the fact that the body is out of sight, and his heart goes out to the son he has so cruelly wronged.

Click! Once again the door is closed. Ronald is gone!

And then George Geldart leaves his hiding-place again, dons a suit and hat of tweeds, an overcoat, and a pair of boots; then, watching his opportunity, he slips downstairs and out of the great house which can never more be his home.

George Geldart is penniless! He determines to go to Ronald, but on reaching the hotel where his son was staying, he is informed that the boy has gone no one knows where. He strolls out into the streets and there sees, what is supposed to be his own funeral, pass, attended with much pomp and show. Then he feels his unutterable loneliness, and is wondering in what direction to turn his steps, when he is greeted in a hearty manner by a man called Stanyer, whom Geldart had known in his youth.

In his will George Geldart disinherits Ronald, and leaves practically everything to Eric, who, with the help of Lord Lynton, puts up for Parliament as Pro-Con. (Progressive-Conservative) candidate for Little Claverton, and is duly elected. He falls in love with Madeleine Lorraine, Lord Lynton's daughter, though he is pledged to marry Clare Armitage, his adopted sister.

After the reading of the will Ronald leaves the house and while wandering aimlessly along the streets, manages to stop a pair of runaway horses attached to a brougham.

Ronald is borne to a doctor's, and there learns that he has saved the life of Madeleine Lorraine, who was in the carriage.

Stanyer has made a fortune in business in Australia, and wants someone to look after things in England for him. He offers the position to Geldart, and the latter, telling him nothing of what has transpired, agrees to act for him, and sets up an office in Crosby Square.

Here Geldart meets with Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, Company Promoter, who has offices in the same building.

Recovering from his accident, Ronald is able to come to the assistance of another girl, Phyllis Daventry, who has been attacked by two pickpockets. His efforts to find a situation have, so far, been in vain, and he is contemplating the necessity of leaving Mrs. Skimper's boarding-house where he had taken up his residence.

All rights reserved.]

Digitized by Google

THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

NINTH CHAPTER.

Eric Makes his Maiden Speech.

Eric Geldart had attained his heart's desire; at least one of its desires, the magic letters M.P. were tacked on to his name. He had taken his seat, and had already proved himself a fighting force and an invaluable adjunct to the band of political guerillas under whose flag he had enlisted, the Progressive Conservatives.

As has been pointed out, it was the policy of that company of Parliamentary irregulars to squeeze the utmost possible out of either party by throwing its weight into either scale when the scales were almost equal and ounces turned the balance, principles which suited Eric Geldart admirably, seeing that he was perfectly willing to throw his weight and influence into either scale, to desert or join any standard, even that of his new made captain, provided there was tangible advantage to be reaped.

To the vain man no walk in life is more alluring or offers more attraction than that of a Member of Parliament, unless perhaps we except that of a successful actor; both perform in the public view, both have their Press notices, and both adapt the part they play to the requirements of the public.

Eric, a young man of means, and not only unmarried but unattached, was as great a social as a political success, and indeed for a similar reason; there was a chance of attaching him.

Lord Lynton lost no opportunity of impressing on his daughter the brilliant future awaiting his political *protégé*, also the necessity of her making a wealthy marriage, and was more than disappointed to observe the indifference of Madeleine towards him. Eric himself made no secret of his infatuation and lost no opportunity of declaring it.

The session was at its meridian and political feeling was peculiarly tense. The Ministerial party were suffering from decrepitude, having survived for several years its re-election after the allotted Ministerial span, and His Majesty's Opposition, after a lengthened period of enervation, had at length girded its loins to a strenuous struggle.

In few phases of life is chance a more potent element than in politics, the glorious uncertainty of cricket is annihilated by the possibilities of a system which enables the destinies of an Empire to be swayed this way or that according as the members of a party are rallied to a swift and cunning whip or have dallied at an Ascot meeting.

The political sky, an arch of speckless turquoise in the morning, may at noon emit from its blue a bolt that will shake the earth, and ere sunset be obscured with cloud.

Party feeling was running high. The answer in hot haste of a minister had been seized upon by an Opposition watchful and alert as terriers at a rat hole, and the Ministry stood on its trial, face to face with not only exultant foes but whilom friends. Eric Geldart, dropping in at Lorraine House, found Lord Lynton in a state of unwonted excitement.

"Geldart!" he exclaimed as Eric entered the morning-room, "they've done it this time, isn't it a judgment on them for the way they've treated me?"

"Exactly what I thought last night when I left the house," said Eric, who had never, as a matter of fact, given the Viscount a first, let alone a second thought in conjunction with the affair.

"They'd have been thrown out last night," the Viscount went on, "if there had been a snap division. I was in the Peer's Gallery watching the whole business."

"It'll be a near thing to-night," said Geldart musingly, "there's a rumour of wobbling on their side."

"Well, now!" said Lynton, "it'll do them good. Perhaps it'll teach them gratitude. They'll be glad enough of your support to-night, for of course you'll go into their lobby?"

Eric made no answer, for just at that moment Madeleine entered, dressed for riding, and looking so delightfully fresh and fair that there was every excuse for Eric talking of anything and everything but politics.

"You had an exciting time last night in the House," she said, "and they tell me the storm isn't over yet."

"Last night's business was child's play to the fun there'll be to-night," he said, "come and see."

To his infinite delight she assented, and Eric, taking care to avoid any further discussion on the subject with her father, walked out with her, and, after assisting her into the saddle made his way clubwards intent on sketching out his plans.

The events of that evening's sitting will long be remembered in the annals of the House of Commons, historic as those annals are.

The word had gone forth even to the very ends of the earth that the fate of the ministry hung in the balance, and the atmosphere of the House was electric with excitement.

In the outer lobbies men of importance and ladies of eminence gathered in crowds, in numbers sufficient to have swamped every gallery in the House, and in many respects the precincts of the House resembled the vestibule of a smart West End theatre on an important first night.

Inside the House, the excitement was most intense of all, for here was the very vortex of a maelstrom, the breathless hush of one minute succeeding the stormy roar of another as this or that gladiator made his point.

Madeleine Lorraine, one of a bevy of fashionable loveliness, gazed on the scene like the rest, under the spell of the fascination peculiar to a momentous contest, whether of intellects or force. For the love of battle is innate in the breasts of women as of men, and in no arena is the battle fought more strenuously than on the House of Commons floor.

Instinctively her eyes sought and rested on the face and form of Eric Geldart. He was seated with the little knot of members forming that tiny apology for a party, the Progressive Conservatives; his legs crossed, his hands in his pockets, his hat shading his eyes, and Lady Harwardine, her chaperon, smiled wisely as, noting the direction of Madeleine's eyes, she whispered:

"There's Mr. Geldart, dear Madeleine; they say he's going to speak to-night. With the House so evenly divided as they say it is on this question, his party will be quite an important one."

Somehow the girl's heart strangely softened towards Geldart that night. She saw him there, a man among representative men, waiting his turn in a contest affecting the destiny of an Empire, he was strong and daring—perhaps, after all, it is strength and daring which women most admire in men.

Somehow she felt her heart beating quicker, and inclining towards him more than ever yet before. For she knew he loved her, he had said to her that, cheered by her, he could be sure of life's battle all along the line, and it is the consciousness of such a faith in her that wins a woman's heart.

Yet, even in that moment there came the recollection of another handsome face, and for the first time she reflected how strangely similar it was to the strong, set face down there.

Then she smiled at her own folly. Grateful as she felt to the brave fellow who at the peril of his own life had saved hers she reflected that in all probability she would never set eyes on him again; they had met just for a few moments, even as ships upon the ocean speeding different ways. And Madeleine remembered that hers were no days, nor was hers the environment of sentimental romance.

And one other woman's eyes were fixed on Eric Geldart's face, while down there the battle waxed fiercer and fiercer.

The Ministry were in a tight place, for the Irish Party, astute Parliamentary hands to a man, and that night in splendid fighting trim, had thrown their lot in with the mover of what was practically a vote of censure on the Government. But ministers, like other men, are often dangerous in the tightest places, and with their backs to the wall they fought like lions.

Below the gangway they were conscious of a few wavereers, and were fully alive to the certainty that the division must be a close thing.

"But," whispered the Home Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer reassuringly, "even if Thurston and Smee

Digitized by Google

mean to rat we've got Maythorne and his lot," and he glanced in the direction of the Progressive Conservative Party, who, so far, had not broken a lance in the tournament.

"I suppose so," said the other, "I suppose Hastie has sounded them. Let's ask him," then, turning to the Ministerial Whip, he whispered, "How about Maythorne's lot?"

"I think they're safe," was the answer, "that chap Geldart seemed inclined to give himself airs when I tackled him at the club, of course he's a young man as well as a young member, and you know their way; said something about the ministerial short memory."

"Oh, yes, old Lynton put him up to that, they're great pals, he's after the daughter, or she's after him, any way, there's the hang of it, we must muzzle Lynton, give him something as a solatium for the Lord Lieutenancy. Hullo, we shall soon learn their little game, Claverton's up!" for that moment Eric Geldart, removing his hat, rose in his place, and the Speaker, ignoring other simultaneous risers, remarked tersely, "Mr. Geldart," recognising the traditional claim of the maiden speaker.

There was a hush, absolutely heavy in its intensity, the courtesy accorded by the House to every member on the occasion of his maiden speech, for who can tell what for the House and for the country may lie in store?

It may be that a new Rupert of debate is about to break his maiden lance, it may be that a new Bernal Osborne is arising to leaven the prosaic routine of Parliament with the brilliancy of his wit, that a new Gladstone has come to thrill it with his fervid eloquence, to galvanise it with his vitality, a new Parnell to disorganise and bewilder it, or a new Disraeli to enthral it with mysterious glamour, alternately to delight it with skilful mockery, to dazzle it with the genius of his statecraft.

True, such are rare birds, even amongst the elected, but it is only when they have fluttered their oratorical wings they can be told.

The Ministerialists accorded Eric an encouraging cheer, the Opposition a polite one, but before he had been on his legs five minutes the benches opposite him clamoured with delight, while those on his own side were dumb with dismay. For the member for little Claverton smote them hip and thigh, holding their policy up to derision and tearing it to tatters and amid a salvo of Opposition cheers swelling into a hurricane from below the gangway.

He resumed his seat after hurling at the Ministry the thunderbolt that the "Pro-Con" party had gone over to the other side.

And, just as suddenly as he, the new member for Little Claverton, sprang into prominence, so that germ of a party fructified and sprang into being as a political force. True it numbered only a sextet, but on a division they meant twelve, and it was anticipated that they, with the ministerial waverers, would turn the scale.

And so it was. The amendment being put, the Speaker called upon those in its favour to say "Aye," and on the contrary "No." And two storms of Aye and No filled the House with their volume, and the Speaker expressing his opinion that the Noes have it, from the Ayes arose a clamorous demand, "Divide—divide—divide!" whereupon the Speaker called upon the strangers to withdraw, to which request the strangers paid no heed, and appointed the tellers of the respective sides.

The division bell began to tingle madly. There was a busy hum as members filed out in twos and threes and groups, many of opposite sides cheerfully conversing together as they went their way, until those ways divided.

"Madeleine, dearest," whispered Lady Harwardine, "what a splendid speech. Eric Geldart has made his name and his mark for ever."

"Yes," answered the girl, adding sadly, "but he has sold his friends."

"Tut, tut, child," the Countess answered, "we are in the world of politics, I will dree his weird, the Hon. Member shall be Right Honourable ere long."

Madeleine could not help wondering whether both terms were not, sometimes bought at the cost of honour. But she made no answer, for her cheeks were aflame, her eyes aglow, her heart was beating fast. The man who loved her above all others had made his mark and set his seal upon his time, there in the eyes of the world.

And when half an hour later he came up to the gallery, she gave him her hand so frankly, with such a look in her wonderful eyes, that he felt the citadel of her heart was almost won. Yes! As in lists of old, Beauty's smile is given of right to him who conquers.

But in that half hour much had happened.

The division over, members filed back into their places, and soon what had been a beggarly array of empty benches, became a packed assembly, with not one patch of leather of the seats visible; the side galleries were crammed, while telephone, telegraph, and cab had brought to the Reporter's Gallery a veritable host.

Amid a breathless hush the tellers returned to the House and ranged themselves before the Speaker's table.

And as they did so, before one word was spoken, there went up from the Opposition a hurricane of cheers, for it was seen that the Opposition teller held in his right hand the white slip of paper containing the figures of the division, and because he bore that simple slip of paper they knew their side had won.

An hour later Eric Geldart, leaving the House, sought

He felt a touch upon his arm. He turned and there, in the starlight, looked upon the face he would fain have forgotten—the face of Clare Armitage.

Digitized by Google

the Terrace that he might cool his heated brow with the breeze from off the river, for heart and brain were in a whirl of excitement, such as comes to few men, an exhilarating intoxication, terrible in the poignancy of its very ecstasy, yet well worth living to feel.

He had won political distinction, of that he was certain, he was certain also of the price of his alliance, of that he had made certain at luncheon time.

And he believed that he had won the heart of Madeleine Lorraine, and to him that seemed a prize almost as precious as political success. Not quite, because he prized the latter above all things in earth or heaven.

His cousin Ferdinand, who had been consumed with indignation at the commencement of his speech, particularly at that portion wherein Eric definitely declared the intention of himself and colleagues to support the vote of censure, moderated the vehemence of his indignation as he observed the effect of Geldart's maiden effort on the House and listened to murmurs of "The most dangerous man against us!" "Pity we've lost that man!" "A new force to be reckoned with," and so on, and so far from answering inquiries as to their kinship with an off-hand "Sort of family connection, very distant!" swelled and beamed with gratification as he answered in a much louder tone, "Oh, yes, member of my family, son of my cousin George. George and I, of course, were like brothers, so I regard this chap quite as a nephew, indeed I'm as proud of him as if he were my son."

And, amid the uproar following the division, Mr. Ferdinand Geldart, M.P., deliberately rose from his seat, doffing his hat and striding majestically along the floor of the house, advanced to where his young kinsman with sparkling eyes and a face aflame, was fitting and extending the right hand glove of good fellowship said in his most impressive tones:

"Eric, I congratulate you. My dear boy, we are opposed in political views, but we are allied in blood and patriotism and I am proud, unaffectedly proud, to congratulate you as one whom I've regarded almost as a son on your brilliant maiden effort, and my only regret is that your dear father, my almost brother, was not spared to be present to witness your brilliant triumph."

While those seated around murmured sympathetic, "Hear—hears!" One member, a journalist representing a Scottish Highland crofter borough and a London Society paper, writing up and working up the incident for the benefit of his readers, Eric listened coolly to his relative's encomium and replied:

"You are extremely kind. Let me see, your name is spelt the same way as mine, is it not? There's some kind of family connection, of course, you came to our house at my father's funeral."

Mr. Ferdinand Geldart was somewhat taken aback at this reception of his overtures towards amity, but, concealing his embarrassment, he replied:

"Oh, yes, yes, your dear father and I were quite like brothers, how dreadful his being cut off in so untimely a fashion. Well, you've done very well and I congratulate you. By-the-bye, have you heard anything of your brother?"

"No, news," said Eric, "and I think you will understand when I ask you as a gentleman, a friend, a kinsman, and a fellow-member of this House, never to mention or to refer to him in my hearing again."

"Quite so," replied Ferdinand. "I heard the story, and I respect your feelings."

On Eric's way through one of the corridors he was stopped and button-holed by an enthusiastic admirer.

"By Jove, Geldart, you've knocked them, you've made yourself, old man."

"Hullo, Scrimshaw!" he said, "how do you do? Where are you?"

"I'm in the Special Gallery."

"Ah, watching the game to get your hand in before you join in it?"

"Yes, Geldart, and if I work it half as well as you, old chap, I shall be more than satisfied. Good-night—good luck!"

"Bounder," muttered Eric, as he strode away, "nevertheless, useful."

How pleasant it was to pace there on the terrace pulling at a rare cigar with the warm South wind of the summer night kissing his fevered forehead, as though to felicitate him on his success within, and to think of it all there alone beside the dark expanse of water that silting and slithering against the Terrace wall, seemed to whisper, "Well done—well done, well begun, go on and on to bigger things, play party against party, man against man, woman against woman, let self be king, self—self—self!"

It seemed to him the very happiest moment of his life. He felt a touch upon his arm. He turned and there, in the star-light, looked upon the face he would fain have forgotten—the face of Clare Armitage!

"Clare," he exclaimed. "You here?"

"Yes, Eric, I've been inside, witnessing your triumph. Eric, you outmatched them all, everybody said yours was the strongest speech, that you were the strongest man, and I listened, and it was music for me to hear, almost as sweet music as listening to you. Yes, Eric dear, I came to share your triumph."

She took his coat-collar in her hands, drew towards him, and would have kissed him, but he pushed her from him rudely—almost roughly.

"Don't be a fool," he exclaimed angrily. "Remember where we are."

"Oh, yes, I know—I know, but, oh, Eric, I came to watch you to-night with my heart full of seething anger only when I saw you and when I listened to you so bold and strong down there, with those white-haired men hanging on to your words, I felt all the anger vanish, there was pride, only pride, and I said I'll forget all hard words, Eric will forget them too."

"No! No!" he exclaimed. "I can't forget, I won't forget, at least what I mean is, what is to be forgotten is the boy and girl nonsense about any attachment between us, it's a dream to be forgotten once and for all."

"What, you tell me that, you dare to say that! Tell me, who was that girl you came and spoke to in the Ladies' Gallery? I saw you, I watched you, though you didn't see me, the girl with fair hair and doll's eyes, tell me, who was she?"

"That lady," he answered sullenly, "is the Hon. Madeleine Lorraine."

"And what is she to you, or you to her?"

He answered deliberately and untruthfully, although it was his hope that what he stated as a fact would some day be one.

"She is my *fiancée*."

Turning deathly white Clare drew herself up for a moment then suddenly her demeanour changed, laying her folded arms upon the parapet of the Terrace wall, she let her forehead fall upon them, and her frame shook with the hidden sobs.

And as they stood there alone, Big Ben up there booming out the hours, an evil thought came into Eric Geldart's mind, an evil impulse stirred his callous heart; there was no one looking, how easy just to—to—— One swift, strenuous heave, she will be over, her voice that could work for him so much harm, would be for ever silenced.

Doubtless could the river speak it could tell of many a one so silenced, many a dangerous presence removed. Should he—should he?

There was an evil name for it, but then if it were never known, she had it in her power to blight the future which shone just now so brilliant, her breath could tarnish it once and for ever, could curse his whole life, and in a moment—just a desperate struggle—and Old Father Thames would tell no tales!

Digitized by Google

He sprang at her, seized her in his arms.

"Eric!" she cried convulsively.

And then up from behind a cloud sailed the silver moon, and there in its steel blue radiance out of the shadows glided and faced him——

Surely he could have sworn to it. His father's spirit!

It stood still, regarding him with wondrous eyes, he felt his heart sink, his blood grow cold, his flesh creep as it passed on.

"Eric! Eric! What do you mean?" asked the girl, looking up into his face.

"Didn't you see it?" he asked.

"What—what?"

"Never mind."

"But why did you seize me like that?"

"I—I was going to kiss you, and to ask you to let bygones be bygones."

"Oh, yes, yes, only, Eric, never forget I can never give you up. Kiss me."

Their lips met, and his imprinted upon hers the kiss of Judas.

TENTH CHAPTER.

"We'll Spoil The'r Little Game."

Since the eventful night of their making each other's acquaintance, Mr. Scrimshaw saw considerably more of his City neighbour, not in his own superb offices, which Geldart rarely entered, but upstairs in the bare, scantily-furnished room that served for the purposes of Stanyer's agency, Scrimshaw often sat after hours and sometimes before his own office hours, arranging with Old Mystery little matters of business he did not care to intrust to his own staff.

The little office on the second floor was not now quite so bare, but it boasted no luxuries.

It was by no means upholstered and furnished like the floor beneath, it boasted no luxurious divans, Turkey carpets, seductive big, saddle-bag or velvet armchairs, no rare prints or engravings, nor was its atmosphere redolent of the subtle flavour of expensive cigarettes. But on the mantelpiece a tape machine intermittently clicked and emitted its serpentine coils of tape with figures, hieroglyphics to the uninstructed or popular world who were not connected with the Markets.

And on Old Mystery's table reposed a telephone tinging every now and then, with one especial switch to Scrimshaw's own apartment, the file of the daily list adorned the walls and a shelf contained interest tables, directories, gazeteers, banking directory, the rules of the Stock Exchange, and other works of reference necessary to such as congregate upon the world's Rialtos.

"I want you," said Scrimshaw one evening, "to write Brallingham, he's the member for Brixwell, and ask him whether he doesn't think the time has arrived for the business he and I discussed to be arranged. I may as well tell you what that business is. He's very hard pressed, and owes me a considerable bit, he's beginning to flounder already, and if he isn't careful he'll be out of his depth in no time."

Old Mystery made a note in a black, oblong book marked "S.," and his semi-principal went on.

"I've shown him one way of getting out of his mess quite comfortably. I want him to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds on the score of ill-health, recommending me as his successor to his party. I've got the place pretty well salted, attended a heap of functions, and I've some property there too.

"We can nobble his association in five minutes, they are a most businesslike lot, and it'll work like a charm. As soon as he announces his intention of retiring I start stumping; by the time the new writ's issued we shall have the whole thing cut and dried. I may want you to do some work for me on the election, only remember, not a word."

"Then are you of Brallingham's own shade?"

"Don't know," grinned the other; "he's just a wee bit too shady. My idea is to attach myself to that new party; they're going to make things hum, I can tell you."

"What! The Pro-Con's? So that's what you wanted me up at the House about last night?"

"Yes, I've approached young Geldart about it; smart chap that!"

"Very!" said Old Mystery, drawing a deep breath.

"He's the backbone of the whole concern. Maythorne's a mere figurehead. Geldart brought off that coup last night; he'll soon elbow Maythorne overboard if he doesn't take a back seat."

"He's not particular I should think."

"Not a bit—hard as nails and smart as paint; almost a bit too smart. I have to watch all the points in dealing with him."

"Then does he deal with you?"

"Oh, yes, we're in a lot of things together. He does an occasional flutter in the Share Market, which reminds me, by the bye, to ask you to make a note to write him reminding him that his cover's exhausted, and that I've a debit of a thousand odd against him; you'll find the figures in my private ledger."

"But I thought Geldart was pretty wealthy."

"So, he is, fairly; only his late governor tied up his money so that this chap can't anticipate income. He ought not to want to, the old man left the lot to him, the younger brother did something quisby—took some securities and bank notes out of the old chap's private safe at home. The old man was in the City, on the produce market, you know; pompous old priz, I believe."

"Ah!" Old Mystery drew a deeper breath.

"Wanted the world to go round just as he wagged his finger—at least so I gather from the young 'un, who's a bit like him himself. However, he conveniently died, as Eric puts it."

Hearing himself spoken of like this invariably gave George Geldart just the impression of having been really dead and buried for months and months beneath the stone crowded with the record of his alleged abundant virtues.

Repressing, however, the shudder that thrilled him, he continued methodically, almost mechanically, to enter Mr. Scrimshaw's instructions in his note book.

"Who do you think they'll put up against you?" he inquired, and Mr. Scrimshaw answered airily:

"I understand the candidate on the other side is a gentleman rejoicing in the name of Blagdon."

"Boanerges Blagdon?" quickly ejaculated Old Mystery, and Mr. Scrimshaw, knitting his brows, said in a curious tone:

"Hullo! What do you know about him?"

"I—I've heard the name."

"Now, look here, Old Mystery, you know lots about him; I know that, though I don't quite know how much you know. Now remember our bargain—I'm content to let you remain Old Mystery, I don't even want to know your right name, who you are, nor who you have been.

"It may be you've made a mistake of some kind, it may be you've come a cropper; that's no business of mine, only this is our compact—you're going to be straight with me and I'm going to be straight with you.

"You and I have one little knack in common; we understand the value

Digitized by Google

of money, the potentiality of money, and the science of figures; we know the worth of property, and in financial calculations next to myself you can cut margins as fine as any man in the city of London.

"This is our bargain, we work in secret, and we're as straight right through the game as we were at the beginning, when you laid on this table the bank note I'd lost and should never have missed, and I, in return, showed you how fifty pounds could be turned next day into five hundred by a little flutter in Eldorado A's."

"That's right."

"Then tell me what manner of man is this fellow Blagdon that I've got to fight."

"Firstly, he's a thief; secondly, he's a bully; thirdly, he's a coward; and fourt ly and lastly, he's a liar."

"A pal of yours, I suppose, from your intimate acquaintance with his character."

"I was once his friend," said Old Mystery.

"And now there's a score to be settled between you, eh? You owe him for something or other."

"It's more a question of what he owes me than what I owe him."

"I say, Mystery, ours was a strange meeting—rather a lucky one. By-the-bye, there's just a possible chance that this fellow Geldart might jib, he certainly would if he could; he's very great pals with Lord Lynton—indeed, they say he's after his daughter.

"Lynton, though in the Lords, is one of the pillars of that political wasp party, the 'Pro-Cons,' and it is just within the bounds of possibility that young Geldart, aided by Lynton, may be able to chuck me overboard, a thing he'd do without a moment's hesitation—if he dared, even I drowned. Now, do you happen to be able to put a string in that direction?'

Old Mystery smiled cunningly, and then his face clouded. He had the man in question in his power, he had only to say the word and the rising star was dimmed for ever. But he remembered, the man in question was his son, the son that he had loved and cherished, and Nature's touch upon his heart strings struck a chord that thrilled him to silence.

At the same time he remembered the other son, to whom, in his firstborn's interest, under that firstborn's influence, and misled by malicious representation, he had been unwarrantly unjust.

He would do his best to right the wrong; it was not only his desire, it was his duty, and Eric Geldart's injustice to his brother should be righted, even though he, his father, had to play the part of that Rhadamanthus whose accepted lot it was to doom his hope and heir.

A boy's feet rattled up the stair. Presently a messenger entered with a cable. Old Mystery opened it with knitted brows, and spelt out of the code agreed upon between himself and Stanyer the following:

"Hear you have been dead four months, explain."

Taking from a safe the file containing the code, he wrote what represented the following:

"Am minding your business—do likewise."

And an hour or so later Frederick Stanyer, sixteen thousand miles away, spelling out this message from the cypher, soliloquised:

"What on earth's the little game? It was George Geldart I met over there before I crossed back, I'll swear, and our little business has worked since like a charm. Whatever game he's playing, he's playing fair with me. I'll take his tip, I'll mind my business and let him mind mine on the other side and his own too."

Then the lonely old man there in the barely furnished room leant his head upon his hands, absorbed in thoughts neither cheering nor consoling.

What a sordid world it was, and what a selfish one, each fighting for each, and those least tainted with greed and grasping going to the wall; a shoal of glutton fishes, the strongest sharks best in the swim, all surging and struggling and fighting for the gold wherewith the devil baits the net for human souls, a flock of ravenous birds in the air, the doves and wrens falling out with broken pinions while the hawks and vultures in the first flight, swooped with swift wings towards the Snare of Gold, the snare that lures to evil and destruction.

He felt some qualms at times regarding the safety of his property, seeing that Eric and Blagdon were two of his trustees.

Then he reflected with satisfaction that there was a third, old Dick Farningham, director of the Bank of England, master of a City company, director and pillar of several of the biggest banks and other corporations in the city; his integrity was above suspicion. But then so had Blagdon's been before he found him out; so had Eric's, his firstborn, until that dread hour when in a sense he himself seemed to have been re-born!

(Another long instalment of this story will appear next week.)

Aceleigh: "Can you unite the separated?" Clairvoyant: "I never fail." Aceleigh: "Well, just connect me with the five-pound note I got separated from last night."

"Has Willie Giggs a responsible position?" asked one girl. "Yes," replied the other, "in one way. Every time his employer rings a bell he's expected to respond."

"I don't know," cried the excited feminine voice in the darkness, "whether you are my husband or a burglar, but I'm going to be on the safe side, and shoot."

Little Johnnie says he likes his Sunday-school better than he does his day-school. In Sunday-school, he says, when he does anything, the teacher only says: "I wouldn't do that?" but in the day-school out comes the cane.

. . THE . .

BOYS' LEADER

Pearson's New Paper.

"THE PAPER A BOY CAN TAKE HOME."

The first number will appear . .

SEPTEMBER 8th. ONE PENNY.

Stories by . .

JULES VERNE,

GEO. MANVILLE FENN,

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

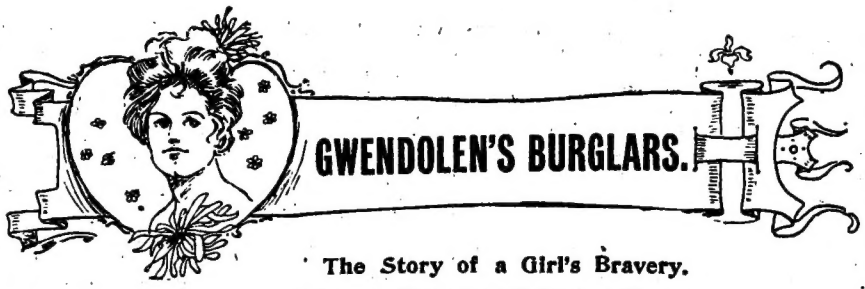
(President of the U.S.).

1000 FREE GIFTS weekly for the mere asking.

Place your order now!

ONE PENNY. SEPTEMBER 8th.

Digitized by Google



GWENDOLEN'S BURGLARS.

The Story of a Girl's Bravery.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

"But, papa, would you have me marry for money?"

The speaker was a lady of twenty-two, who addressed a worried-looking gentleman of sixty years.

She was his only daughter—his only child in fact—and he would have been justified had he considered few men deserving of her.

She was very pretty. She had a pliant, graceful figure; a perfectly colourless face, excepting for the vivid red in her lips; eyes hazel, and black brows, and hair bright as sunlight.

"I would *not* have you marry for money," her father said. "That would be a degrading contract. Allan Prescott has something besides his money to recommend him. Still, his pecuniary advantages are not to be despised. I wish to see you comfortably established in life, for my affairs are in such a bad condition that I fear I cannot long support you."

"If you simply desire me to be supported, I might maintain myself. I can play the piano; I can keep house; I can paint on china and make a pudding. Surely, I can find my vocation!"

She spoke lightly, but her words irritated her father.

"You have said something like that before, Gwendolen, and you mean it, in spite of your trifling tone. Why don't you say frankly that you would be a music teacher, a housekeeper, a dauber on china, or a cook, rather than marry Prescott? That is undoubtedly what you mean."

"If you prefer me to say such disagreeable things, I will do so, papa."

Her father took her by the shoulders, while an expression on his face indicated that he would like to shake her. She remained standing, her black brows drawn into a sharp little point above her nose, and with a decidedly bored expression about her red, sarcastic lips.

"Now meet the question fairly. Will you marry Allan Prescott or not?"

"I should think it would be soon enough to answer when he asks me," she said, inconsequently. "Would you have me emulate Elizabeth Baxter, who refused her lover 'afore he axed her'?"

"He has told me of his intention to ask you to be his wife, and I would know what answer you will make. Oh, Gwendolen, can you not see that you have worried me to death? My business affairs are reaching a crisis, and before the end comes I want to see you safely cared for. If Prescott was unworthy of you, I would tell you to paint pottery for a living rather than be his wife; but he is a gentleman, a man of honour, and he is fond of you. What more can you desire? Confide in me, my dear. What answer will you make?"

She drew away from him.

"Don't ask me, papa. I really don't know what I *shall* say."

Mr. Thayer seated himself with an air of a man whose patience was exhausted.

"Go away!" he said, crossly. "I can never get a straightforward answer from you. I want to be alone."

She started to go—a little resentful flush rising in her cheeks—then hesitated, came back, knelt beside his mute figure, and placed her cool little hands upon his head.

"Dear papa, if you will know that I mean no disrespect to you, I will tell you all I feel regarding this proposal."

He made no answer, but incircled her with his arm.

"When you told me this morning that Mr. Prescott had spoken to you, you were displeased because I did not accede at once to his proposal. You said he was honourable and agreeable, and that he had money. You and I have been so constantly together since mother died that I had believed you would be reluctant to lose me, and yet you seemed very willing to give me up. Your business required ready money, you said, and if you had not the expense of keeping a home for me you might save enough for your purpose. I know your trouble, and I want to help you. But would you want me to marry if we were in straitened circumstances? Suppose Mr. Prescott were poor; would you still wish me to be his wife?"

Her father withdrew his arm from her waist.

"Let us be candid with ourselves and with each other, papa. I cannot marry for a mercenary motive."

"Very well," he interrupted, almost roughly; "let us have no more words about it. You are willing to see me bankrupt and disgraced. I might have expected as much from one with your sentimentalities."

Her answer startled him.

"Yes," she said, rising to her feet, "I would rather see you a wretched pauper in the street than know that my father, whom I had honoured, had sold his daughter to keep up the business."

She was going haughtily out of the room, when he stopped her.

"It is as well that you should know the details of the case," he said. "I will not be alone in my pauperism, for when I fall a score of my creditors will sink with me. They will say I have robbed them, though God knows nothing has been further from my intention. My house is already mortgaged for more than it is worth, and I am absolutely without resource."

She put her arms about his neck now, and drew his tired head against her bosom.

"Will you not consider this proposal, Gwendolen? Allan will be here to-night, and will want his answer."

"Yes," she said, slowly; "I will consider it."

* * * * *

Gwendolen had cause to be proud of Allan Prescott's love. He was a man of exceptional attainments, and, better still, a man of perfect honour.

He was ten years older than she, had a spirited and handsome face, a tall, active figure, and a breadth of chest and firmness of muscles which spoke eloquently of his strength.

He and Gwendolen's father were both manufacturers; and though the former did not know it, his success in his commercial career had added many lines to Mr. Thayer's careworn face. Mr. Prescott, having so much more capital, had been able to supply retailers with goods much faster than Mr. Thayer, and had thus unwittingly gained many of the latter's customers.

Mr. Thayer believed it would be useless to struggle against such competition, and was in despair, when Allan came proposing to marry Gwendolen. If only the girl would yield, here was an easy adjustment of all difficulties. Those two men, once related, could not remain rivals, but must unite their interests.

It was Saturday, and Mr. Prescott was expected at Thayer's house, there to remain until Monday. Being quite incapable of taking any advantage of his host, he had acquainted Mr. Thayer with his intention of addressing Gwendolen with a proposal of marriage.

She was lovely that evening. Even her father noticed that she looked remarkably well. As soon as he could do so gracefully, he left her alone with her lover

Digitized by Google

He went to the library and sat there an hour. He wondered what was being said behind the closed drawing-room doors. What answer would Gwendolen make?

She had been standing beside a centre-table when he left the room, with the strong light of the chandelier shining full upon her face, but he had not been able to judge from her expression what was in her mind.

How cool, how self-possessed, how almost scornful she looked in that glaring light! She had known perfectly well why he was leaving her alone with Allan. Had she mentally blamed or thanked him for his absence?

The time dragged on. It would have been difficult to judge who was the most anxious to know her answer—the young, hopeful lover within the closed doors, or the tired old man who waited without.

The drawing-room doors opened at last, and footsteps approached the library.

"When you are ready to retire," Gwendolen was saying, "James will show you to the south room. You will prefer it to the guests' chamber, into which the sun can never shine. Good night."

Then she ran upstairs. Mr. Thayer rose to his feet.

"Well," he said, extending his hand as Prescott entered the library; "has she given her consent?"

Allan took the offered hand and answered, huskily:

"She has refused me. If I had been a poor man," he continued, at length, "I might have had a chance of winning her. She realises that she would better her financial condition by marrying me, and she would not accept me with that thought in her mind. She has been most candid with me, and I have never loved and admired her more than I have to-night. She has told me of your difficulties, and how my manufactories are hurting yours. If you like, we will talk over your affairs, and see if, together, we can pull you out of the troubles into which you have fallen."

Very late that night Mr. Thayer tapped at Gwendolen's door.

"I saw your light, and knew you must be awake," he said. "I want to tell you that my affairs will be all right, after all. I am very sorry you disappointed Prescott, Gwendolen. Still, you know your own heart best. He has proposed that he and I shall unite our business interests, and after this the firm's name will be Prescott and Thayer. If it was all right between you two, I would be happier to-night than I have been in twenty years.

"By the way, I sent James to bed an hour ago, and did not remember to ask him what room Prescott was to occupy. He said he believed you mentioned it was on the south side of the house. Being in doubt about it, I put him into the guests' chamber. Good-night, my dear. You should have been asleep long hours ago."

He went away, and Gwendolen turned her light down very low, and seated herself at the open window.

So Allan had taken her father into partnership with him. She had told him of their embarrassing circumstances because she believed he would be considerate of his weaker competitor; but she had not hoped for such generosity as this.

She had told him frankly that she liked him, but had never thought of him as a lover until that day.

Coming, as his proposal did, together with her sudden knowledge of her poverty, she had been unable to separate them in her thoughts; and she would not do him the injustice, nor herself the dishonour, of promising to marry him while she could weigh any mercenary considerations.

She sat a long time, thinking of what had passed between them. Now that she had refused him, he would probably come there no more, and, very singularly, the thought gave her pain.

She was still sitting in the darkness, when she was surprised by hearing footsteps in the corridor. Everyone in the house should have retired long before, and yet she was certain she heard subdued voices close to her door. What did it all mean? Who could be going stealthily through the halls at two o'clock in the morning? The house was large, and her room was far from her father's or the guests' chamber.

She suddenly felt a sickening sense of fear and helplessness. Were there burglars in the house? The thought set her heart beating so wildly that she was sure it must betray her. She was not a timid woman, but had never encountered any danger great enough to test her courage.

She listened. After all, she might have been mistaken. She could hear nothing now. Doubtless the sounds which had frightened her had been conjured by her overwrought imagination; she had been excited by the events of the day—by her father's misfortunes, by Mr. Prescott's proposal, and by the disappointment and pain she had unwillingly given him.

All these occurrences had made her nervous, and induced her present unreasonable state of fear. She was calling herself a coward, when she discovered a light shining through the crack above her door.

She crept across the room and listened intently, with her face pressed close to the door. There were several men outside—how many she could not learn; but even in the tumult of her excitement she managed to hear some of their conversation. They had stopped close beside the door.

"Which is his room?" one man asked.

"Hush!" said a second. "Not that one—don't turn the knob!—that's Miss Thayer's bedroom. His is in the lower hall. She told me he was to sleep in the south chamber."

"We'll go to his first," said a third. "They say he carries a bag of money with him every Saturday night. Be careful with that lantern, and keep quiet. If he wakes, he'll be a tough customer to deal with."

A sharp click followed, which startled Gwendolen almost into a shriek. Some one had cocked a revolver.

"I think that will quiet him," one of the men remarked.

Gwendolen stood with her hands pressed to her heart, trying to restrain its tumultuous beating.

She had now recognised the second speaker to be her father's butler; and with a woman's quick intuition had understood the whole situation of affairs. These men were burglars, and the butler, either by choice or compulsion, was their accomplice.

He had been told that Mr. Prescott was to occupy the south chamber, and had not known of the exchange made in that gentleman's quarters through Mr. Thayer's mistake. He was therefore conducting his two burglar companions to the south room, where they expected to rob Allan Prescott. Not finding him there, the butler would immediately suppose he was in the guests' chamber, where they would find him.

What chance had one man, unconscious of danger, and doubtless asleep—what possible chance could he have against three armed and desperate ruffians?

These thoughts flashed through her mind while the burglars went stealthily down the corridor. She had not made a sound, for it would have been worse than useless for her to call for help.

In that remote part of the house no one would hear her, excepting the burglars themselves, and she shuddered while she thought that they might so effectually silence her that she would never utter another sound. She was not a coward, and she suddenly determined to risk her life to save Allan Prescott from these outlaws.

The guests' chamber was in a wing of the house opposite from the south room, and she would attempt to reach Mr. Prescott's door, and warn him of his danger before the burglars returned. It would be a perilous experiment. They might have some one stationed in the corridor, or she might, by a mis-step in the dark, betray her intention. Should they discover her, they might make short work of her. Still she would risk the danger for the man who had befriended her father

Digitized by Google

Knowing that she must act quickly, she summoned all her courage and unlocked the door. When it opened, it creaked raspingly upon its hinges. She listened. Had it betrayed her? Instead of retreating, the footsteps now advanced.

She tried to close and lock her door, alive now to her own danger; but she was too late. Three masked men were in her room, stifling the cries which broke from her white lips, and binding her hands and feet with cords which cut cruelly into her delicate flesh.

It was all done so quickly that she had scarcely realised what happened. A lantern had been thrust into her face blinding her so that she could not see her assailants. They had told her that if she uttered a cry, or attempted to escape, they would send her into eternity.

They had not covered her mouth, knowing, doubtless, that, even if she had dared to cry for help, she could not be heard. they bound her to the chair into which they had roughly thrust her, and left her alone.

She could only remember that she had failed to save her lover from these men, who were in search of his money, and who would have it if they stained their hands with his blood to obtain it.

She remained, perforce, where they had left her, sick and dizzy with pain and fright, when she suddenly saw a chance of escape. She attempted an experiment from which another woman would have shrunk as fearfully as from the burglars.

The gas-jet was just above her head, and the light burned very low, as she had left it when she sat by the window. She found that, by holding her hands high above her head, she could reach the burner.

She determined to burn the cords from her wrists.

It was a daring feat; but she accomplished it, moaning with pain, but clinching her teeth when the fire licked her tender flesh, and bearing her suffering like a staunch little martyr at the stake.

When her hands were free, it was a comparatively easy matter to remove the other bindings, and she stood released.

The burglars had left the door open, so she had one difficulty less to encounter. She was thankful that her dress was of wool, and did not rustle when she moved.

She slipped noiselessly into the hall, which was now dark, since the thieves had taken their lantern with them.

In spite of her excitement, she could hear them returning. They had found the south room empty, and were on their way to the guests' chamber.

There was no time for caution now. They were close behind her, and she must run—run for her life, and save Allan Prescott.

She rushed through the dark corridor, hearing a frightful oath which followed her, and knowing their footsteps were in hot pursuit. The door of the guests' chamber was before her. Unless they fired and shot her, she would reach it in time.

* * * * *

Mr. Prescott had been very restless that night. Gwendolen's refusal had bitterly disappointed him.

He reproached himself for having been so precipitate in his proposal.

"Why did I not wait?" he asked himself. "Why was I such an insane fool as to suppose she had understood my regard for her? She has been very honest with me. Another woman, in her circumstances, would have married me off-hand, to escape from her difficulties. Gwendolen said that she liked me, but she chose poverty and hard work rather than pretend that her liking was anything warmer than it is. Perhaps I might have won her, if I had been less impatient to test her feeling for me. Now all is lost."

He did not undress nor attempt to sleep. He sat moodily, watching a foolish moth fluttering about the light. He was still busy with his gloomy thoughts when some one tried his door. It was locked, and the person without beat violently against it, calling him by name.

"There are burglars in the house! They are coming to your room! Oh, wake!—do wake at once!"

He opened the door, and Miss Thayer almost fell into the room. "Ring the bell!" she implored, "and try to wake the servants. Have you nothing with which to defend yourself? The butler is in league with the thieves."

He rang the bell and rushed into the hall.

In a little while he returned, and found her white as ashes.

"Too late!" he said. "They heard you at my door and ran away. We have the butler, however, and will probably catch the others also. When did you see them first?" Then seeing the burns and livid marks where the cords had cut into her wrists, he gave a cry. "You have been hurt! Tell me what has happened!"

They went to the library, where she told him all, while he dressed her wrists as tenderly as a woman could have done.

"And you did all this for me, Gwendolen?" he said.

"You have done more for me to-night than *I* for you. You have saved my father's good name. And I love you, Allan."

He started to catch her in his arms, but drew back.

"You do not mean that, Gwendolen. You have had a terrible strain on your nerves to-night, and you feel happy and at rest because the danger is past."

She rested her injured wrists upon his arms.

"You have reason to doubt me—reason to disbelieve me—since I have not known my own mind. But hear me now. To-night, when you spoke to me in the drawing-room, I did not know my heart. I believed I had only a warm friendship for you, and that I had more anxiety about papa's affairs than affection for you. I meant to be honest with you, for I thought too much of you to deceive you, even for my father's sake."

"Do not deceive yourself this time, Gwendolen," he cried. "I cannot bear a second disappointment."

She continued a little more firmly and courageously:

"After I went to my room I began to see matters differently. Papa came and told me his troubles were at an end, and I knew we could live here just as we had always done, the only difference being that you would not come to see me. That difference made me very wretched. I began to know that if you had been poor, and dishonoured, as papa came so near being, I would have shared your fate rather than remain here without seeing you. And then the danger came to you, and I *knew* that if you were killed I should die. Papa's troubles did not influence me then. I put my arms into that flame to save you, because I——"

He had her in a close embrace long before this.

"Go on," he whispered. "Let me drink my fill of this sweet confession. Because I——"

"Because I love you, Allan."

* * * * *

Mr. Thayer came down late to breakfast. Having been relieved of his heaviest cares, he had slept sounder than usual, and had heard none of the disturbance caused by the burglars.

He was most astonished when he learnt what had happened.

"I telegraphed for a detective," Prescott told him, "and he came immediately. I was fortunate enough to secure the butler, and had him locked in his own pantry until morning When he was arrested he told who his accomplices were, and the detective says he will have them within twenty-four hours. They ran away empty-handed; but, sir, had it not been for your daughter's bravery, they might have succeeded in carrying away considerable plunder."

"You and Gwen look remarkably cheerful for persons who have passed such a night of horror," Mr. Thayer remarked.

"Last night a second partnership was agreed upon in your library, and all it lacks now is your sanction," replied Allan.

Mr. Thayer stared in bewilderment.

"What!" he said. "Has she changed her mind?"

"Oh, no! I only made the mistake of insisting upon having my answer five hours before it was ready for me."

A. C. Manton.

Digitized by Google

Fairview.

The Story of an Old Maid's Love.

"Fairview! Fairview Station!"

I had been half-asleep after a railway journey of eight long hours, but as the porter's cry rang in my ears I started up wide awake and greatly excited.

The little station at which we had stopped was a dainty affair at the boundary of a large private estate, and I stood beside my box, as the train dashed forward again, looking down a long avenue of large trees on one side, while beyond the railway track and but a little distance from it, stretched a rocky coast, against which the ocean broke in a hoarse, monotonous roar.

I was looking at the waves dashing up on the great rocks, when a voice beside me inquired:

"Miss Maxwell?"

"Yes," I said, turning quickly to face an elderly man who had left a handsome carriage and pair at the steps of the station platform.

"I have your box on, miss," he said respectfully. "I drove down as soon as we heard the train stop. It is but a step," and he held open the carriage-door for me.

And, indeed, the distance in the grounds themselves was so short that, but for the box, it would have been a farce to send the carriage.

We drove round an imposing sweep in front of a stately mansion, and as the carriage stopped, a tall figure, in the deepest mourning, came from the drawing-room window upon the wide verandah to meet me.

Even in the excitement of meeting my hostess for the first time, I could not avoid the start of surprise her appearance caused.

Without one spot or line to break the black of her dress, her face, rising from the heavy crape ruffle at the throat, was utterly colourless, and her hair, banded in waving masses, was white as snow.

Large, black eyes, soft as velvet and deeply mournful, looked out from the deathly white face, giving it a startling appearance. The features, as I knew later, were perfect, and as she took my hands and drew me into a close, tender embrace, her lips parted in a smile, very sad, but very loving.

"You have come," she said, in a low voice, deep, but musical. "How very kind! We are strangers yet, but I hope you will learn to love me."

"It is you who are kind," I said quickly, "to give me a summer holiday in this lovely spot, and so near the sea. I love the sea."

A strong shudder shook the tall, erect figure still holding my girlish one in a close embrace; but my hostess only said:

"You must be very tired, and Nancy shall show you to your room to rest before dinner. I hope you are hungry, too, dear, for I have ordered our midday dinner to wait for your arrival. Jerome has taken your box in, and Nancy is waiting."

As she spoke I noticed for the first time a servant waiting in the doorway a woman past middle age, who curtesied as I looked at her.

"Show Miss Maxwell her room, Nancy," her mistress said, "and make her comfortable until dinner-time."

I had been too much bewildered to say much, and had still a dazed feeling as Nancy led the way to a large room, most beautifully furnished, from whose wide open windows I could see the ocean rolling in, to break in great crested waves upon the rocks, that lined the coast, while below me stretched to the shore a garden full of July bloom, carefully tended, and with only a delicate wire fence to separate it from the rocks beyond.

Nancy made me most thoroughly comfortable, unpacking my clean linen while I was in the bath she had prepared, brushing out my hair and braiding it loosely, bringing me a cup of tea and some biscuits, and finally settling me in a deep armchair by the window, with the advice to take a nap until she came to dress me for dinner.

But I was far too much excited at first to sleep, and curled up in my chair to think over once more the strange circumstances that had brought me to Fairview.

Two years before I had lost my father, and from a life of luxury and self-indulgence was suddenly called upon to earn the bread I ate, or starve. I was but nineteen, and motherless from a child, my father's idol, with no idea of economy, household affairs or bread-winning in any sense of the word.

As a heroine, I am aware I should have been slighted by my friends as well, but truth compels me to acknowledge that I never knew what good friends I had until I needed them. All my burdens were shared by tender sympathy, a class of music scholars made for me, a pleasant boarding-house found, and I was set afloat in my new life by kindest care.

For two years my life was tranquil and busy, and I learnt many of the lessons poverty only teaches. But when my second summer holiday came, I was counting my spare cash to see if I could get a week or two of country air, when a letter came to me from "Fairview," signed by "Hesba Lovering," a strange letter, that cost me many hours of anxious thought before I answered it.

She wrote to me that my father had been her friend many long years before, but that the news of his death had just reached her.

She wanted to know, to love the only child of her old friend and begged me to spend my summer holiday at Fairview as her guest.

Very delicately she told me that she knew of my altered circumstances, and suggested that, if I could be happy with her, I was to remain as her companion at a salary more than double the income I was able to make by teaching.

Kindness itself was in every line of the letter, but not one word of patronage. On the contrary, Miss Lovering wrote of her own lonely, loveless life, as if the kindness was all to come from me in the acceptance of her offer.

After much deliberation I accepted the invitation for the summer only, and found myself, on a hot July day, curled up in an armchair in a luxurious room looking at the ocean, and dreamily wondering "what would come next?"

What did come was a profound sleep, from which Nancy roused me to dress for dinner. Oh, the luxury of having a maid once more, of resigning my heavy, troublesome hair to skilled fingers, to be daintily attired without an effort of my own, and see a fluffy mass of white muslin, with little black bows here and there, in place of my travelling-dress, and yet take no thought of myself!

Nancy seemed to be as delighted at exercising her taste and skill as lady's-maid as I was to have her, and gave me a last finishing stroke, with the remark:

Digitized by Google

"There, miss, you are all right, and the prettiest thing we've had in Fairview for many a long year."

My hostess was in the drawing-room, waiting for me, and the dinner-bell, and I saw that, although she had changed her dress, it was still of black, unbroken by line or spot of white; but, in spite of the appearance of age given by her snow-white hair, I noticed that the ghastly pale complexion was smooth as a child's, without one wrinkle upon the broad, white brow.

Her step was light and firm, her teeth perfect, her form erect and vigorous. To look in her face, one might guess her age to be sixty or seventy; to see her move, or hear her speak, one would readily believe her to be twenty-five.

She was an enigma to me in every way, but nothing could exceed her kindness; and I had not been her guest a week before I loved her with the enthusiastic devotion only possible in young, ardent natures.

We had no society—literally none; but every other pleasure was placed before me. A trained saddle-horse carried me for long, breezy rides, with Jerome for a protector and guide; a low pony-carriage, Miss Lovering driving, took me inland to all the pretty spots within miles of our home.

A grand piano had been tuned for me, and piles of new music placed beside it; an ample library was always open, and a perfect storehouse of materials and patterns invited me to all the newest devices in fancy-work.

I was very happy, singing about the house, reading aloud to my kind friend, trying my skill at needlework, without a care or a tear. But every day, in sunshine or in storm, I had an hour or two of actual terror in trying to meet Miss Lovering's wishes in what seemed to me a strange whim.

I have already spoken of the rocks that lined the coast near Fairview; in one of these, the largest of all, there was a deep cave, like a vast room, some seven feet high, but stretching back to gloomy depths of shadow.

At low tide the floor was hard and dry as a board, but there were great rocks scattered all about, like chairs and footstools.

At high tide the entire cave was filled with water, and it was impossible to escape from it as the shore lay below the entrance.

To me it was a gloomy, dangerous place, to be avoided with shuddering terror. But here I found myself every day when the tide was low, watching Miss Lovering with a sort of fascinated horror. She never asked me to go, but she led the way and I followed.

She sat upon one of the rocks facing the ocean, and looking with her dark, mournful eyes out upon the waves, as if they held her by some mysterious spell. Never speaking, her lips often moved silently, while her hands were clasped in a rigid, strained fashion, as if to suppress cries of agony.

Often the water touched our feet before she roused herself, and we had to wade through it knee-deep back to safety. It terrified me, but it fascinated me.

We were there in the heaviest thunderstorms, when the reverberations were deafening; we were there in soft summer showers; we were there when the sunlight lay like glittering diamonds on the dancing waves, seeming to mock the weary, white face turned towards it.

This cave had a weird fascination for Miss Lovering. One of her bedroom windows commanded a view of it, and there she would sit for hours, her hands idly folded, gazing at the entrance, for she could not see beyond that, while the look of agony on her face was like that of a person in intense bodily pain.

It will easily be understood from what I have already written that Hesba Lovering was not the companion to be chosen by a girl, young and full of activity; but with all her sadness, and the mystery of her strange loneliness, she was charming.

She had the rarest powers of conversation, and, having lived many years abroad, could bring into vivid light the scenes she had witnessed, the people she had met, the adventures she had shared, often caressing my hand while she talked, and giving me the rare, sad smile that was the nearest approach to pleasure her face ever expressed.

It was one of her peculiarities that she was entirely idle.

She made me sing or play for her, and showed her knowledge of music by correction or criticism, but she never touched the piano.

She left her house entirely to the care of a housekeeper, her grounds to the direction of a head gardener; her sewing was done by a resident seamstress, under Nancy's direction, and she never touched fancy work.

She was the only person not an invalid I ever saw who sat with her hands folded or clasped entirely empty at all times.

Occupation would have seemed a necessity to one so lonely, for, excepting myself, she saw no one but her servants, and it was impossible for her to make a companion of a servant.

A tall figure . . . came from the drawing-room window.

The summer was gone, when, one morning, we were seated in the cave, I crouched on the sands at Miss Lovering's feet, and I said—

"My holiday ends this week."

To my amazement she drew me into her arms in a strong clasp, crying out in a tone I never heard from her lips before:

"You will not leave me! You will not go! I cannot bear the agony of my life alone again! You will stay!"

"But," I said, "you must have relatives or dearer friends who will come to you?"

"None! My relatives are dead, my friends are scattered. Listen! I did not mean to tell you, but I will. All this is yours."

"All what?" I asked wonderingly.

"Fairview and an income of two thousand pounds a year. I made my will before you came, and when I die you are my sole heiress. If you leave me you will come back after my death, for I will never alter that will, but, oh, my child, I implore you to stay!"

"Yes," I said, "yes; but I cannot understand. Why should I, a total stranger, inherit your fortune?"

"I will tell you all!

Google

Yes," she cried fiercely, as if answering some unheard voice, "I *will* tell you. But Bessie, your father, did he *never* speak of me, or of Fairview?"

The pleading passion in her voice was hard to answer, but I said:

"Never. I never heard of Fairview until I received your letter. But I once heard him speak of an Aunt Lovering and a cousin that——"

"Hush! Hush! Do not speak her name! Did he tell you," and her voice sank to a shuddering whisper, "how she died?"

"No."

"I must tell you! It will turn all your love to hate."

"Nothing can do that!" I cried.

"But I must tell you. Something drives me on and on to speak! No one has ever heard, no one knows! I might carry my secret to the grave, but I will tell *you*, Gerald Maxwell's child, the child of the only man I ever loved."

"Do not tell me now," I said. "You are not able. You are trembling from head to foot."

"Yes, now—now, with the great, hungry waves calling me! Oh, how I hate the ocean—how I fear and hate it! That was the beginning of what I am going to tell you. Uncle Arthur Lovering owned Fairview, built it, and chose this spot because he had an adoration for the sea. In locked rooms I never open you will find priceless treasures of marine life, collected for years from all parts of the world; they represented my uncle Arthur's life.

"Ethel, your father's cousin and mine, was as enthusiastic as he was, while I shrank and shuddered like a fool at all the slimy horrors, and would not admire even the shells. We were orphans—Ethel and I—children of uncle Arthur's two brothers, with equal claim upon him; but I was sent away to a boarding-school, and Ethel kept at Fairview with a governess and when he died he left me a hundred pounds a year, and Ethel all else he possessed. It was not just—even now I say it was not just."

"It was not," I said, as she waited for me to speak.

"I had been banished from Fairview for years when uncle Arthur died, and soon after Ethel wrote to me to come and share her home. There was one provision in the will that, if Ethel died unmarried, I was to be my uncle's heiress, and Ethel thought I ought to share her home.

"Why did I come? Why did I ever enter the house? For listen! I loved your father, and he loved me. I was living with my mother's aunt, and Gerald Maxwell was my dearest friend. He did love me, and yet I came to Fairview.

"I had been here through a long dreary winter before I knew that Gerald Maxwell was Ethel's cousin—her mother's nephew. There were other guests in the house, and Ethel's governess was chaperon when Gerald came to Fairview.

"Then there awoke in my heart a jealousy and envy that were little short of insanity. To my eyes, distorted by this unworthy passion, Gerald was wooing the heiress. He was the same to me, but I would not see that he had not changed, and I drew back in angry pride to leave the field to Ethel. She was so pretty—a living sunbeam—with golden hair and blue eyes, not tall and dark as I was; and she was winsome and gentle, full of tender, loving ways that I could never have. I was cold and grave.

"Gerald shared all her pleasure in adding to uncle Arthur's collection of sea treasures, and they spent hours together amongst the rocks, gathering what the waves had left there, finding anenomes, selecting sea-weeds, and then coming home to spend hours again in preparing what they had collected for the shelves of the museum.

"I never shared their rambles. I hated the sea, and, above all, I hated this cave, where they would find many wonderful shells and rare weeds. Did you ever notice the anenomes here, Bessie? They say they are wonderful!"

I confessed my ignorance, never having been much on the coast.

"Those anenomes," said Miss Lovering, "they drew Ethel here as if they had some magic power. As soon as the tide was low she took her basket and her knife to come to see what the sea had brought her, or to seek the anenomes far back in the shadows of the cave. Sometimes she begged me to come but I never would. I was afraid of being caught in the cave and drowned. My terror of the sea was inborn and utterly unreasonable, but it was too deeply rooted for me to conquer.

"All that summer the house was full of guests. We drove and rode, we danced and sang as if uncle Arthur had been a century in his grave instead of eleven months. It shocked me, who scarcely knew him, but Ethel was her own mistress, past twenty-one, and her word was law in the household. I did not suffer from want of attention, for I was a very handsome woman in those days, and Ethel was liberal in her gifts of pretty articles for my wardrobe.

"But I loved Gerald while I was driving him away from me by my bitter, jealous suspicions. I would not see that he gave Ethel a cousin's love, paid her the attentions due to his hostess. Excepting that he shared her love of the ocean, he paid her no more attention than the other gentlemen in the household did; but I was wilfully blind to that fact.

"To my jealous fancy he was courting the heiress of Fairview, and setting aside any claim I might have. He had never asked me to be his wife, so there was nothing to bind him, and I was too proud to try to win a love that was taken from me. Bessie! Bessie! How can I tell you the rest? Oh, will my heart never break? Will this weary life never end?"

She was rocking herself to and fro on her seat of stone, her hands clasped over her knees, her face working with agitation. I implored her to cease trying to tell me her story. I begged her to come home, but I might as well have talked to the roaring waves beating on the rocks at our feet.

"I must tell you!" she cried. "See, do you understand? One life stood between me and Fairview. One life stood between me and Gerald Maxwell. If Ethel died I would be heiress of Fairview, and Gerald would return to me.

"It was in September—— Hush! Hush! Don't tell me it was on this very day—the third of September! I was at my window—you know where I sit—I was looking out, thinking my own wicked thoughts, when I saw Ethel go into the cave alone.

"I scarcely noticed her, it was so common a thing to see her go upon the same errand; but when the tide began to rise, Ethel did not come out. You understand, Bessie, she did not come out, and I sat and watched the tide rise!"

She shivered as she spoke, her voice almost a scream.

Presently, in a low tone, almost a whisper, she continued:

"When the tide went out they found her. She had fallen over one of the rocks and broken her leg. Probably she fainted; but she was lying on her face, drowned by the cruel waves she loved so much. Only one word, one cry from me would have sent strong arms to rescue her at any moment after I saw her danger.

"But I did not move or speak. I saw Gerald Maxwell enter the cave when the tide went out. I saw his face of horror as he hurried to the house for help. I saw the men carry the light hall sofa to the shore and stand it below the cave, while they climbed up and with much hard work lowered the body.

"I saw them bring Ethel to her home for the last time, and still I never moved. I could hear voices calling me, hands shaking my door, but I did not stir. It was night when I staggered down to the library, where Ethel lay, in a dim twilight, upon a long table.

"She was dead and Fairview was mine, and I knelt down and prayed to die too, reviling the hour I was born. All the guests remained for the funeral, and I was pitied and caressed as one utterly overcome by the shock of my cousin's death.

"Gerald was tenderly kind to me as a father to a sick child, but he went away with the others after the funeral.

"A few days later he wrote to me, telling me how deeply he had ever loved me, how he had hoped to make me his wife until this fortune came between us. He was going abroad, he wrote, to conquer his love, if he could, for he would never place himself in the position of a fortune-hunter.

"Every line told me his love. Every line told me this was

Digitized by Google

farewell. I was a murderer for his sake, and my punishment was that I lost him for ever.

"I lay all winter praying yet fearing to die, and in the spring I went to Europe. I travelled everywhere, yet ever the sea was calling me back to Fairview. I saw Gerald Maxwell's marriage in a newspaper, and did not die; I could not die, for I was strong and well, and I was afraid to take my own life.

"So the years dragged on and on, and ever the sea was drawing me back to Fairview, until I came here, to live over, day after day, that fatal scene that made me accursed in the sight of Heaven, although no living man or woman has ever suspected me. See!" she cried, standing erect suddenly, "the tide has come now for *me!* See it rise!"

And then for the first time I noticed it, creeping up and up on the slippery shelf of rock that lay between the entrance to the cave and the land. It was already in the cave, and escape over the slippery rocks, under water, was always difficult.

"Go!" Miss Lovering cried; "they have not come for *you!* Go!"

"Not without you!" I screamed, clinging to her; "you must come."

"No; I will never leave the cave again! See! Ethel mocks me—your father is beside her!"

"Oh!" I murmured as the awful truth smote upon me, "she is mad!"

"The tide comes for me," she said, "but not for you!"

She caught my wrists as she spoke, in a strong grasp, so far beyond my power to resist, that I was like a child in her hands. Before I could prevent her, even if I had had the power, she pushed me from the mouth of the cave, and let me fall to the rocks below.

Half stunned, drenched from head to foot, I staggered to my feet, and tried to climb up again, only to slip back every time. I could see her sitting in her old attitude, deaf to my cries, gazing out upon the water, that was already covering her feet.

I could see her sitting in her old attitude.

I ran along the shore, screaming for help, until I came to a group of fishermen, to whom I appealed frantically.

"In yon cave?" one said; "then she's drowned for sure."

"But she is not drowned yet," I cried; "bring a boat and save her."

"There's not a boat could get there, miss. The waves would dash any boat to atoms on them rocks, with the tide coming in."

"Come yourselves, then," I cried; "you shall be paid anything you ask. You can climb up and save her."

"Why didn't she come out?" asked one. "There was time enough afore you could o' run here."

"Oh, please come," I said; "while you are talking, she is drowning."

"Who is it?" asked one.

"Miss Lovering, of Fairview."

"Eh! The madwoman?"

"She is not mad!"

"Well, they do be saying she is! But she is rich?"

"Yes! yes!" I cried eagerly. "Very, very rich. You will be well paid if you save her."

Greed conquered, and they rose to their feet, five strong fishermen, whose bare, muscular arms and legs gave me fresh courage. I sped along ahead of them, my wet garments hampering me, but nerved by a new hope.

When the cave came in sight, I dropped like a stone to the ground. The whole entrance was under water!

"Don't take on so," one of the men said, not unkindly; "she could have got out, and she's but a poor crazy body. Everybody down to the harbour knows she's been crazy for years. Don't take on, now. We'll get her out for you as soon as the tide goes out, if you will go up to the house and wait."

But I would not stir. It seemed to be years before the tide turned, and crept out slowly, slowly, until a white rigid face, with staring eyes, could be seen above the waters; crept down, slowly, slowly, until I could see the still, motionless figure, as I had left it, looking out upon the hungry waves.

They said afterwards she must have died of heart-disease before the waves reached her face, or the death struggle would have thrown her from her seat. I cannot tell! I only know how we found her, rigid and motionless, as I had seen her sitting for hours through the long summer, only that the weary heart had ceased to throb, the sin-shadowed life was ended.

S. A. Shields.

Digitized by Google

His Former Friends.

Should a Man Drop All His Old Chums When He Becomes Engaged?

"Congratulations, old chap, and all the rest of it!"

"Thanks, Jack, I hope to say the same to you soon."

"Not much, you won't catch me getting tied up, at least not for a few years at any rate."

The speakers were Sidney Weston and Jack Carthropp. The former had become engaged only a day previously.

"I suppose we sha'n't see you at all now, Sid?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't suppose Ethel will want me every evening; I'm sure to have one or two evenings free for a game of bridge or a cycle ride."

"Good! Then you won't be altogether beyond the pale."

So time went on, but Sidney Weston only very occasionally met his erstwhile chums. Before he was engaged he had been one of a faithful band of four. Very often they would go away for week-ends; they went together to almost every play in the London theatres that was well spoken of, and generally had dinner together before. Two of the four lived in "diggings," and very often they would give a bridge or a whist party continuing until early in the morning.

Then Sydney Weston met Ethel Thornleigh and fell in love with her. His outings with the other men grew less frequent, and to finish it all he became engaged.

The other three congratulated him, but secretly thought it was a very silly thing to do. Whenever they had a love affair it only lasted two or three weeks, and this they pointed out to Weston, and suggested that he should do the same. He laughed and told them they did not know what love meant.

On his way home from the station one evening, Weston met Jack Carthropp.

"By the way, Sid," said the latter after the usual commonplaces, "I was going to look you up to-night. I want you to come round to my rooms to-morrow night and make a fourth at bridge. Miss Thornleigh will spare you for one evening, won't she?"

"I don't much expect I shall be seeing her to-morrow night, she's going with her mother somewhere. So I'll come round."

"Don't forget, then, eight o'clock," were Jack Carthropp's parting words.

Later on that evening Sidney Weston met his *fiancée* as usual. They were walking slowly along in that apparently aimless manner peculiar to lovers.

"I'm going round to Jack Carthropp's place to play bridge to-morrow night, Ethel."

"Why, you're always going there."

"My dear girl, I've been twice since we have been engaged. Besides, you know I sha'n't be seeing you to-morrow night, you had already arranged that."

"I suppose you are only too glad to avail yourself of an opportunity of a change from my society," rejoined Ethel in a pettish tone. Any mention of Weston's former chums was to her like a red rag is supposed to be to a bull.

"Why can't you stay at home when you're not seeing me? I don't rush off and see people immediately, supposing you don't happen to be coming round," she went on.

"Well, dear, surely there's no harm in my going round to play bridge at Carthropp's place. What can I do if I stay at home?"

"You can read. I don't know why you do not take up some hobby to employ your spare time."

"But when I come home," replied Sid, "I want enjoyment. And if I can't see you, I take what else I can, and that happens to be my male friends."

"I suppose that is how it will be when we are married. I sha'n't be sufficient, you'll always be wanting those nasty fellows in, or else going out with them and leaving me alone."

"Why, Ethel, how can you say such things? You know you come first in all my thoughts. You know I'd sooner be with you than with any one else. It's only when I can't see you that I meet my old chums. And you know how occasionally that is."

The end of it was that Sid went home with a heavy heart, and a feeling that Ethel was very unreasonable. Whilst Miss Thornleigh cried herself to sleep in the belief that she did not occupy the whole of Sidney's heart.

"I'm having a few of the fellows in to dinner next week, Ethel," said Weston some few nights after.

"Are you?" was the not very gracious reply.

"Yes, dear. You know I promised before I was engaged that I'd give a dinner to the fellows when I got my promotion, so I'll do it next week and get it over."

"Will there only be men there?"

"Yes, it will only be an informal affair. The mater has promised to see that there's a good spread, though."

"I think you ought to say that as you're engaged you cannot have the dinner now."

"Why, Ethel?" cried Sidney in surprised tones. "What ever for? I promised it, and I cannot break my word. 'Twill be the last I shall ever have of the sort, surely there's no harm in it?"

"Why can't you have girls? I don't like being left out in the cold."

"But don't you see, dear? I promised this before I hardly knew you, just for the fellows, and I cannot back out of it now."

"It's always the same, you and those wretched men friends. You always put them before me."

"My dear girl, I don't. You are always first in my thoughts, and, knowing how much I care for you, I wonder how you can say such things to me."

"I think you ought to put them off," said Ethel in a persistent manner.

"But, Ethel, I cannot break my word."

There was no reply.

"You see, if I'd known you before, I should not have made such an arrangement."

This sort of conversation occurred almost every evening until the night of the dinner came round. On the evening previous to it, Ethel worked herself into quite a fever heat over it.

"I hope you'll enjoy yourself to-morrow night," she said in a cold, hard manner.

"Ethel, are you going to be nice at all about it? You know you've made me sorry I ever made any arrangement for the dinner at all, and I shall not enjoy it anything like I should have done."

"Yes you will, you'll forget all about me with your men friends, and enjoy yourself as much as possible."

Digitized by Google

"How can you be so cruel, Ethel?"

"How can *I* be cruel?" she repeated.

"Yes, you."

"But I'm not, it's you that are cruel. I don't know why you became engaged to me when you prefer the society of your men friends."

"Why will you harp on that subject, Ethel, when you know I'd sooner have you with me than anyone else on earth? It's only when I can't have you that I see other men. You see, you haven't any particular chums, so you can't see things in the same light as I do."

"It's a good thing I haven't," she replied. "For if I went out like you do we should never see each other."

"Like I do?" he repeated. "During the three months we have been engaged I have spent three nights in the society of the fellows."

"But you wanted to spend more, two or three times you suggested going to the theatre with them."

"But that was some evening when I was not seeing you."

"If you want to go to the theatre, why cannot we go together?"

"You know you are not particularly fond of it, and very likely you wouldn't have gone. At any rate, I did not go when I saw you did not like the idea of my going out without you."

"Well, I hope you'll enjoy yourself to-morrow evening."

"I shall try to by not thinking of you if I can help it," was his bitter reply.

"I expect that will be very easy when you're with those fellows," was her equally bitter retort.

"Oh, why are you so like this, Ethel? You do so misunderstand me."

"Do I?"

"Yes; knowing how much I love you to think that I put others before you."

There was no reply. The couple were now outside Ethel Thornleigh's home. She turned to go in.

"Good-night, Sidney." Then she shut the gate.

He gazed at her in sad surprise, she had never left him like this before. Slowly he turned and walked away. Suddenly there was a rustle of skirts and the patter of running feet.

"Oh, Sidney, I can't let you go like this!" her voice cried in his ear. Then he turned and caught her in his arms, and there was no heartache that night.

So the night of the dinner went by, and for some little time all was clear sailing again.

"Sidney, I'm going down to Mabel Horton's for the week-end next week. She's home for the holidays and has written asking me to spend the week-end there. I always go once a year, you know."

"All right, dear," cheerfully responded Sidney. "Still, I'll see you don't go when you are Mrs. Weston."

"You silly old dear, I sha'n't want to then. I'd sooner you came with me now, but you know they cannot put you up as they have only one spare room."

"That's all right, Ethel. You enjoy yourself, I don't mind."

It was three nights after this that Sidney Weston was with Ethel Thornleigh, and in a gleeful tone exclaimed:

"What luck, dear! You know you'll be away next week-end?"

"Yes."

"Well, the fellows are going to Hastings for the week-end, so I shall be able to join them."

"Do you mean you'll go to Hastings with them?"

"Yes, dear."

"I thought that's how it would be! Directly there's an opportunity of rushing about with those fellows, off you go."

"But why shouldn't I, Ethel? You'll be away and enjoying yourself."

"Why cannot you stop at home for once?"

"Great Scott, Ethel! I'm always at home. Ever so much more than I used to be."

"It makes me wonder how things will be when we are married. You won't be content to stay at home and take things easy, and go in for quiet amusements. You'll want to be running about all over the place, that's how it will be."

"You don't understand, Ethel, or else you won't, that when I've got you I shall want nothing else besides. I sha'n't want any men friends or that sort of thing when we are married and I can have you always. And as to going about without you, why, I shouldn't think of such a thing. I should always want to be with you as much as possible."

At any rate both went away to their separate rendezvous, and they managed to enjoy themselves. Though the same thought, that they would have enjoyed themselves more together, occurred to each.

The short absence brought a great longing for reunion, and in consequence they were too much taken up with each other to quarrel about the week-end subject again.

"I'm going to meet Dolly Hewett next Friday, Sid. So I sha'n't be seeing you," announced Ethel one evening.

"All right, old girl," was Sidney's response, "I'll clean my bike that evening; it can do with it."

Next week Ethel stated she was seeing Dolly Hewett both on Tuesday and Friday. Sidney Weston was somewhat surprised, but still he good-naturedly raised no objection.

The week after she announced that she had asked Dolly Hewett to go shopping up West with her on Saturday. Now Saturday was always kept most religiously to themselve In consequence Weston was somewhat annoyed.

"That's a little rough on me, isn't it, Ethel?"

"But I've promised Dolly Hewett."

"Hang Dolly Hewett!" growled Weston.

"Don't say 'Hang Dolly Hewett,' Sid, it's not ni e."

"Well, I'd like to do something to get her out of the way," he grimly replied.

"Why should you be so hard on her, Sidney?"

"Well, why should she interfere between you and me?"

"For the same reason, I suppose, as you allowed your friends to interfere between you and me."

"But they didn't; you know I always saw them on evenings when you could not see me."

"Still, you knew I disliked your going with them. But, Sid, do you mind much about my going out with Dolly Hewett?"

"Oh, no," he retorted bitterly. "If you'd sooner go with her than with me, do so by all means."

"Oh, Sid!" she cried, and then the tears came into her eyes. In a second he was by her side.

"My dear," he whispered, as he held her in his arms, "I did not mean it; you know I want you with me always."

"Then I won't go with her, Sid, if you do not like it," and she smiled through her tears.

"And I'll give up going with the fellows," he cried.

"But sometimes," she said with a smile, when her lips were free, "I'll set the prisoner at liberty for a time and give him permission to go out, won't that be good of me?"

"Yes, dear. But the only real way will be to see each other every evening except under very special circumstances."

And that, after all, seemed the best way out of the difficulty. Therefore, young man and young maiden, take this to heart, and when you become engaged don't have any chums, they are apt to cause jealousy, and jealousy generally leads to quarrels.

Wenton.

Digitized by Google

Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

THE FIRST SIX EPISODES.

Though my real name is not Olive Beresford, I am calling myself that for the purpose of these confessions. An aunt had left me an income of £150 a year, and just as I was wondering how I should occupy my time, I received a letter from Annabel Vernon, an old school-friend, who was now married, to come and spend the week at Vernon Towers.

I was delighted to accept the invitation, and arrived on the Friday evening, being met by Mr. Vernon at the station. The house party consisted of a Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Taskot and Mr. Dean Fisher, who was an expert Bridge player.

After dinner, a Mr. Bainbrig and his sister, near neighbours of the Vernons, arrived, and Bridge was proposed. Miss Bainbrig and I were novices at the game, and Mr. Fisher undertook to teach us how to play, Mr. Taskot making the fourth at our table. We played for a penny a game—at least, that was what I understood penny points to mean—and I congratulated myself that my partner and I were doing very well. The scores were not added up that evening, so I did not know exactly how matters stood.

On the Saturday morning I got up early and went for a walk, during which I met Mr. Taskot, who told me that he had lost heavily the previous night after the ladies had retired.

That same evening we played Bridge again, and when the scores were added up Annabel told me that my losses amounted to £11 7s. 10d.

This sum meant a great deal to me, and I wondered how I was ever to pay it. I made friends with Mr. Taskot, and learnt from him that I was supposed to be an heiress. When I told him how matters really stood he promised to help me.

We met the following morning, Sunday, before breakfast at the spot where we had previously encountered one another. Mr. Taskot told me that I had only been asked to Vernon Towers that my friends, as I thought them, might fleece me. He promised to lend me the £11 7s. 10d., and we fixed upon a code of signals by which we might meet the sharpers on an equal footing.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Grainger, on her way to early service at church, saw us together. I then knew that I should hear more of the meeting.

In the afternoon, while the other members of the party occupied themselves with cards, I went for a walk, during which I was rescued from a mad dog by a Mr. Maurice Ray, who gave vent to an expression almost of surprise when he learnt where I was staying.

On the Monday I sat down to the card-table with delight, looking forward to having my revenge.

To my horror, however, at the end of a most successful game for me, I discovered that my signals had been suspected and Mr. Vernon had succeeded in taking snapshots of all the signs my partner and I had made to each other.

EPISODE NINE.

Some Terrible Alternatives.

"Come, Miss Beresford, you have been allowed ample time to lament the failure of your plot, and I now await your attention."

At these words, spoken in a cold, sarcastic tone by Harry Vernon, I was stung into something like recovered self-possession, and, hurriedly dashing the futile tears from my cheeks, I stood up to face my denouncers, knowing full well that I need expect neither pity nor mercy from them.

"As you please," I said, in an almost inaudible voice. "I am ready to listen."

"And to *heed*," added Annabel. "Otherwise, you will live in Queer Street for the rest of your life."

"Look here, darling, let me manage this business now. I think I know better how to deal with our treacherous guest than you do, and I would prefer not to risk such interference as your tender little heart might dictate."

So said my host, and I could almost have laughed at the idea of Annabel Vernon being accused of possessing too tender a heart to deal with a lonely girl whom her own evil trickery had stung into reprisals. But I was in too terrible a position to pay lengthened attention to anything but my own woes, and I hardly realised the full sting of her answer until afterwards.

"Poor boy," she cooed, kissing her husband with an affectation of innocence which was in ghastly contrast to her black nature. Poor, dear boy! What a shame it is to have such ingratitude displayed towards you, after trying your best to make other people happy. Never mind. However badly other people may behave, we have each other, eh?"

"Oh, what a hypocrite!" I thought, clenching my hands still tighter together, in the tremendous effort that was required to enable me to retain a comparatively calm demeanour. "How dare she pretend to have been trying to make me happy!"

Mr. Vernon smiled affectionately at his wife as she passed out of the room, leaving him to "deal with their treacherous guest," upon whom he now bent a look as hard as adamant.

"Don't let me keep you standing," he said, with a mock politeness which contrasted forcibly with his determined manner. "I should be sorry to cause you unnecessary fatigue."

I was shaking so much that I was glad to sit down, and I am afraid the true inwardness of the case did nothing to mitigate my sense of guilt or of coming disaster. Mr. Taskot's specious reasonings lost all their fatal glamour, and I felt that nobody would believe the excuses which previously seemed so convincing.

"A curious little series, isn't it?" observed Mr. Vernon, sitting down near me, and manipulating the tell-tale photographs in such a way as to bring each one, in turn, under my notice. "When these are reproduced in various papers, accompanied by the story of their origin, I fancy they will make a great sensation. 'Country House Scandal. Lady guest cheats at cards. Plot to swindle the host and hostess.' What fine headlines these will make! And what a reception Miss Beresford will meet with when she tries to mix with her old associates as a respectable person! Quite interesting, isn't it?"

Goaded to speech by these cowardly words, I made a vain effort to regain the position my nervelessness had lost me.

Digitized by Google

"You forget," I said, "that there is another side of the story. How about the cards which I saw Mrs. Vernon put up her sleeve?"

"Yes, I just thought you would try that sort of a dodge on! Happily, nobody is likely to believe a wild tale, concocted after detection, by a person whose own misdeeds are proved beyond possibility of denial."

These dreadful words turned me absolutely sick with horror, for, though they were so wide of the truth, I knew very well that the man who spoke them was right in his opinion, that whatever I said against the Vernons now would be construed into a feeble and vile attempt to put the guilt on to the wrong shoulders.

"You don't answer me," he continued. "That means that you have not a word to say in excuse of your ungrateful conduct, and that you see no reason why we should not denounce you to the police as a swindling adventuress."

"For Heaven's sake, don't do that!" I gasped. "I couldn't live under the disgrace."

"I see nothing else for it, unless——"

"Unless what? Unless what?"

"Unless you pursue your recent tactics with more caution."

"I shall never adopt them again! The lesson they have given me will suffice for all time."

"A lesson in caution—yes. But your little device for winning other people's money is too valuable to be allowed to drop. You have shown yourself very clever in your own interests. You must now display equal cleverness in ours."

"I do not understand you."

"Yet it is not difficult to grasp my meaning. Instead of playing with Mr. Taskot for your partner, you will henceforth prove useful to my wife and me. So I give you your choice. Either you will repay us for our trouble and forbearance by winning for us, or you will go to prison. You can please yourself which you do. But there is no doubt as to the course that will prove least disastrous to you."

"I am going home. I do not want to touch a card again."

"That is a great pity, Miss Beresford, for you are not going home, and you will have to touch hundreds of cards before we have done with you, unless you choose the alternative penalties of ruin, exposure, prison, and perpetual disgrace."

"But even if you compel me to accede to your terms, there is still Mr. Taskot. He knows everything."

"But he will keep the knowledge to himself, for his own sake. He is even less able to afford disgrace than you are, for he is a well-known personage in society, so he has chosen the wiser course. He has agreed to pay a sum down as indemnity; to leave Vernon Towers at once; and to keep a still tongue in his head for ever, if you agree to do likewise."

I do not seek to excuse myself for not having the moral power to defy Harry Vernon, and take the threatened consequences of my previous folly. But I never had quite my share of courage, and I was terrified into submission by the prospect of evils which I dared not face. I was also vaguely hopeful of some unexpected way out of my difficulty, and, seeking to stave off disaster, I tearfully consented to do whatever the Vernons commanded me to do.

"You agree to my terms?" demanded Mr. Vernon.

And my answer, low spoken though it was, satisfied him.

"I must!" were the words I quivered. "I have no help for it."

EPISODE TEN.

I Make a Desperate Resolve.

Mr. Taskot must have left The Towers immediately after his interview with Mr. Dean Fisher, for he did not make his appearance at dinner, and we were informed, with many expressed regrets, that "dear Mr. Taskot" had had a telegram, which had compelled him to rush off to catch the first train up to town, without having time to say good-bye to anybody.

"Happily," continued Annabel, "we have persuaded Olive to stay on for a while. She is her own mistress, so we are not interfering with anybody else's comfort by having her here, and I'm sure I hope she'll stop with us for many a week. It's so nice to have a girl friend in the house."

To this deceitful speech I gave no answer, but, mindful of certain lessons which had been impressed upon me, I did nothing to betray its true value. Nor did I offer any contradiction when my former school friend went on to say that she must insist on my taking more fresh air and outdoor exercise than I had done during the last few days, to dispel the nasty headache which late hours seemed to have brought on.

Mrs. Grainger was already making preparations for departure, and when Annabel suggested that she also should prolong her visit, the negative answer was so emphatic that I concluded the poor lady had lost a great deal more money than she liked.

But, before leaving, she gave me a very cordial invitation to visit her after I left Vernon Towers, and I promised to do so.

That same evening, the Bainbrigs and a couple of friends of theirs came in for a game at Bridge. The strangers were brothers, named Garford, who were made very welcome when it transpired that they were fairly wealthy.

"How nice of you to make our party up into two sets," smiled Annabel to Miss Bainbrig, who replied: "To tell the truth, we wanted another rubber. But the boys haven't played yet, although they want to learn, so we thought they couldn't do better than learn from somebody with more experience of Bridge than we have."

"That makes five novices in the party," mused Annabel, "so we don't quite know how to parcel ourselves out. The best way will be to cut for partners."

Everybody agreed to this, and I had a wild hope that my punishment was to be staved off for the present. But my hope was soon belied, for Harry Vernon and I were cast as partners, and though I felt sure that this result had been obtained by trickery, I could not help myself. Our opponents were Mr. Bainbrig and one of the Garfords, and I sat down to the table with such a feeling of despair at the idea of deliberately cheating people who had never injured me, that there was actual truth in my sudden plea of illness.

"Oh, I cannot play!" I faltered, letting my hands fall nervelessly into my lap. "I—I feel so ill."

"Ill!" exclaimed Annabel, from the other table. "There, what a forgetful little wretch I am! I promised you a splendid cure for your kind of complaint, and I had forgotten all about it. Harry, do you mind fetching it? It is in the third left-hand drawer of your bureau, where you locked it, to be safe until I asked you for it."

Harry rose from his seat with a show of alacrity, and nobody but myself understood the meaning of the searching

Digitized by Google

look he bent upon my face. Neither did they guess that Annabel's words veiled a dreadful threat.

But they were not obscure to me. For it was in the third left-hand drawer of the bureau in Harry's "den" that the fatal photographs had been locked, and as I dared not risk their production, I made a desperate attempt to recover myself.

"No, don't trouble to fetch the medicine," I stammered. "I am nearly well again, and I would not take it if you fetched it."

"But you might have a relapse," suggested Mr. Vernon, who with difficulty repressed the smile which his knowledge of fresh victory evoked.

"It was only a passing faintness, and 'relapse' is too strong a word to use."

My host was now sure that he had quelled my feeble attempt at rebellion. But he had no mind to trust to a partner whose nerves were all ashake, so he solicitously fetched me a glass of champagne, and his outward manner was kindness itself as he whispered: "There, Miss Beresford, I daresay this will prove more agreeable than the medicine Annabel believes in."

I drank the wine, and having satisfied the guests that my indisposition had really been only a passing one, I lifted the cards dealt out to me. I was dummy this time, so had nothing to do, and before my right-hand opponent had become the dealer, I was possessed by the glamour of the game we had started.

Nevertheless, I failed to give the required signals, and my heart quaked when, it being now my turn to deal, I caught the threatening look bent upon me by my partner.

"You still look very shaky," he murmured significantly. "Don't you think I had better fetch Annabel's remedy?"

After that I became desperate, and Mr. Vernon had no cause to accuse his partner of lack of *rapport*. We played far into the night, and when I went to bed I was the sharer in a large sum of money won from our unsuspecting opponents.

The attractions of the game itself, and the excitement of making big scores, together with the knowledge of what lay in store for me if I refused to obey orders, were all conducive to the temporary lulling of my conscience, and my laughter rang out more than once clearly enough to provoke a swift glance of intelligence between the rapacious couple into whose toils I had fallen

But, once in my own room, influenced by neither the glamour of play nor the threats of exposure, I threw myself on the bed, and wept a heartbroken requiem to my own self-respect.

"You are a deliberate cheat!" I told myself. "You could find excuses for retaliating upon the people who only brought you here to swindle you out of the money they thought you possessed. But what excuse have you for helping to cheat honourable persons who have never done you any wrong?"

So spoke the voice of Conscience. But the voice of Fear interposed.

"You dare not face exposure," it said. "And you know very well that you are in a trap from which your captors will only allow you to escape after you have served their purpose. Dare to defy them, or refuse to do their bidding, and you are lost for ever."

Then came Desperation to advise me.

"Are you sure," it said, "that there is no way of escape? Are you going to resign yourself to a life of constant fear and ignominy? And do you forget that even after you have helped these people to rob others of their fortunes, they will still hold those photographs as a weapon of terror over you?"

Ah! That was where the worst sting came in! It was not a case of speedy liberation from thraldom, but of more abject plunging into slavery. Why, then, should I not make an effort to free myself from the power of my cruel enemies?

"The third left-hand drawer of the bureau."

Was it quite inaccessible to me? And was it quite beyond the bounds of possibility for me to abstract and destroy the proofs of my former folly?

Anxious deliberation convinced me that my position, even in the case of detection in the attempt, could not be much worse than it was. If I failed, and if the Vernons guessed that I had tried to free myself from their power, they could but impose weightier penalties upon me, and as I knew by this time that they subordinated everything to their greed, I did not think that they would utterly destroy the goose through whose agency they hoped to gather so many golden eggs.

"Yes, I will risk it!" I determined at last. "I will wait until three o'clock. Everybody is sure to be in bed and asleep by that time. Then I will try to secure the photographs, and, if I succeed, I will leave Vernon Towers to-morrow."

EPISODE ELEVEN.

The Third Left-Hand Drawer of the Bureau.

I wonder how a burglar, not yet accustomed to his work, feels? I am sure his first experience in his chosen profession must be a terrifying one. But it cannot be half so trying as was my midnight adventure at Vernon Towers. The burglar, whatever may be the privations that drive him originally into theft, deliberately selects the locale of his operations, and no doubt weighs up very carefully the respective attractions of several dwellings.

But to me, whose task was equally dangerous and underhand, there was no choice of venue, and I would almost have given my life to be free from the necessity of doing that which stress of circumstances was now compelling me to do. Yet it was my only hope, and I made my preparations with a caution born of the most desperate anxiety to rid myself of a deadly incubus.

Carefully selecting my apparel, I prepared myself to avoid all unnecessary risks of detection. My dark tea-gown was lined with nun's-veiling, and would not give the slightest rustle. Neither would my bedroom slippers betray me, and there was no fear that I should make more noise than I could help.

I had noticed the kind of key used by Mr. Vernon when he locked the drawer of the bureau, and fancied that it was rather like one that figured on my own bunch. But, though I took the precaution of carrying my own keys with me, I had little hope that they would prove useful. Failing a key to fit the lock, I meant to prise the drawer open, provided I could find a suitable implement to do it with.

"I shall of course remove nothing but the photographs of me which were taken without my permission," I argued. "But their removal will at once inform the Vernons who it is that has tampered with the bureau. The question is—Will they make a fuss? Or will they understand the danger of provoking me to explain that they compelled me to cheat

Digitized by Google

for them, under threat of exposure? The very fact that they played with me after taking those snap-shots ought to show that they were ready to condone whatever I did, so long as they were able to make an ultimate profit by it. Anyhow, I can only save myself by fighting my enemies in the dark."

To reach Mr. Vernon's little sanctum, it was necessary to pass several bedrooms, and I quaked a good deal as I did so. But I passed down to the first floor without being apparently either seen or heard, and was thankful to find that the door of the room was not locked. Hastily turning the door handle I passed in, shutting myself up with little fear now of being interrupted at my work, even though I turned up the electric light.

Greatly to my dismay, the flap of the bureau was locked, and I had thus two difficulties to overcome instead of one. The piece of furniture was quite of modern make, and its lock was not particularly complicated. But my keys proved quite useless to serve my purpose, and I looked round for something powerful enough to force the flap open. A strong steel paper-knife lay on the mantelpiece, and I eagerly seized it.

Gliding back to the bureau, I was inserting the knife beneath the flap, when I heard that which made my heart almost stop beating. There was a noise in the corridor outside, as of swiftly advancing footsteps, and I looked wildly round for a possible hiding place. To turn down the light was the work of a second, and to squeeze myself behind a huge easy-chair did not take a minute.

But I had barely done so much when the door was hurriedly opened, and my horror can be imagined when I realised that both Harry and Annabel Vernon had followed me!

If the light had been seen shining under the door I was lost, even if I had not been already suspected of being here, and I positively quivered with dread of what the near future had in store for me.

With what relief therefore did I gather that this nocturnal visit to Harry Vernon's den had nothing to do with the fact that I was there first. Probably the door was too well made to allow a chink of light to shine through, and I was glad that my operations had not gone far enough to betray my presence.

The lock of the bureau was as its owners had left it. The keys with which I had tried to open it were in my pocket. And it was hardly likely that either husband or wife would notice that the paper knife was not on the mantelpiece still. If only they did not look behind the chair, I was saved!

"A most stupid thing to do," observed Annabel. "But it is not too late to prevent mischief."

"I don't know that it was stupid," contradicted Harry. "In fact, I think it was exceedingly clever of you to mention the exact place in which she saw 'the medicine' deposited. Anyhow it gave her a fright, and instantly brought her to reason."

"Yes, but if I had not remembered about it, our plans might have been upset. The girl is not so simple as she looks, and I believe he quite capable of trying to ruin our beautiful little scheme by abstracting the photographs."

"So do I. But we are rather too clever for her. If she does attempt to take the proofs out of the third left-hand drawer of the bureau, she will find her trouble wasted. I'll slip them behind the overmantel. Nobody would dream of looking there for them, and I'll duplicate them to-morrow. We shall then be secure against accidents."

The next two minutes were about the most anxious ones of my life. Everything now depended upon which side of the overmantel Harry Vernon selected as a hiding place. If he came to the side on which I was hidden, all hope of rescue was at an end for me, and I should be in his evil power as long as he chose to exercise it.

With my heart beating almost to suffocation, I listened and quaked while the bureau was denuded of its fatal proofs, and while these were transferred to the back of the overmantel. And with what thankfulness did I observe that the opposite side of the fireplace afforded a readier means of access than the one which sheltered me!

(Another instalment next week.)

YOUR EDITOR CHATS.

I have received the following letter from a married lady reader of Short Stories:

"*Dear Sir,—A short time ago in your paper,* Short Stories, *there was a love problem, entitled, "A Matter of Course; or, Should a Husband be a Complacent Person?" and I want, through your paper, to thank the author of that story for a deal of happiness it has brought me. We have been married three years, and I have one of the best of husbands in every possible way, only in the one thing he was exactly like the husband in that tale, and therefore unknowingly caused me many an unhappy hour, the reason being that he did not understand how much those little words 'I love you,' mean to a woman, be she either wife or sweetheart.*

"*I never had the strength of will to try to give him the lesson the wife in the tale did, and instead of us drawing closer together, I expect I should have grown in time heartily tired of it all, and we would have gradually drifted apart. But now all is altered, we are really the happiest couple in the kingdom, for one day he took that paper away with him, read the tale, and wrote asking me if that was really how I felt over the matter, and, if so, that in future everything would be different, for, 'like the man in the tale,' he had always cared ever such a lot for me, but did not think it necessary to simply tell me so. He thought I ought to know, and for three long years I was often very unhappy and never cared to tell him why. My husband asked me to write and give both our heartiest thanks to the author for the happy chance that caused him to write, and us to read, 'A Matter of Course.'—Yours gratefully,*

"A Very Happy Wife."

[I am delighted to hear that at least one married couple have benefited by reading a story in Short Stories. Do any other readers know of similar experiences?]

I would take this opportunity of reminding competitors in First Juggled Letters competition that all attempts must reach this office not later than by first post on Thursday this week, August 27th, and I would again draw your attention to the sentence in last week's "Your Editor Chats," which reads: "The attempts of competitors who do not address their envelopes correctly are liable to be disqualified." The proper way to address the envelope containing your attempts is: The Editor, Short Stories, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., with the words "Juggled Letters" in the top left-hand corner.

I have been glad to learn from the many letters received that both the new series and new serial are popular, and I expect that as further instalments of "The Bridge of Ruin" are published general surprise at the revelations will be expressed. Anyone who has not already started to read them should do so at once; they will be sorry to have missed any of the incidents that appear each week.

Though the summer is drawing to a close it is not yet too late for contributions to the Fresh Air Fund to be sent, and I would ask all those who have not already forwarded a donation to remember that in the heart of our big cities there are thousands of small children pining for a breath of pure, fresh air. To these children the boon of a whole day in the country is inestimable. With the sum of ninepence, laid out by the Fresh Air Fund, one child can have this coveted boon. Wouldn't you like to feel that you had helped to make one little life happier?

All contributions should be sent to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. They will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly.*

Your Editor.

Digitized by Google

The Conversion of Colonel Crackenthorpe.

Telling of How a Cycling Picnic Started the Wedding Bells Ringing.

"*The Secretary of the Witheram Cycling Club presents his compliments to Col. Crackenthorpe, and wishes to know whether he would be so very kind as to accord to the Members of the Club permission to pass through his grounds on the afternoon of the 27th inst., and to visit the ruins of Crackenthorpe Abbey. The Secretary would undertake to promise that no damage or injury of any kind shall be done to the ruins by any member of the club.*"

"What infernal impudence!" cried the Colonel, after reading the above epistle at the breakfast-table. "As if I were likely to allow a whole lot of tag, rag, and bob-tail on cycles to come into the park. The Secretary of the Witheram Cycling Club indeed. I like his impudence! What's the fellow's name? Ah! here it is—Mr. Arthur K. Brandon. Now who on earth is Mr. Arthur K. Brandon?"

"Brandon!" cried Lucille, the eldest girl. "Why, Connie, wasn't that the name of the man you met when you were staying with the Hampdens'?"

"Just look at Connie's face, it's nearly as red as Aunt Clara's cap-ribbons!" began Madge, the irrepressible, and only very vigorous treatment from Lucille under the table, stopped that young damsel's further remarks before their father's attention was aroused.

"Yes," said Connie calmly, though a little tell-tale colour had certainly risen in her face when the name was mentioned. "He was a great friend of the Hampdens, and Witheram is not far from their place."

"Well, *I* don't know the man from Adam," cried the Colonel, "and I call it great cheek on his part to write to me. Why, I should have a lot of these tiresome cyclists careering madly about in my grounds I don't know. It's bad enough to meet them suddenly in the roads."

Colonel Crackenthorpe was one of the few remaining bigoted opponents of the wheel. When the craze first set in among the fashionable world, he had set his face rigorously against it, and had forbidden his daughters to learn. A good many fathers of families in the neighbourhood had started with the same idea, but by degrees all had given in to the force of circumstances, except the Colonel, who prided himself on his consistency; and though his daughters might sigh with envy when their friends described the delights of a glorious spin, he remained firm in his determination.

"Our ruins, of course, are one of the most interesting sights of the county, and one can hardly wonder at people wanting to see them," put in Lucille, who was a clever girl, and knew her father's weak points.

But an unexpected and quite unintentional ally sprang up in the shape of Aunt Clara.

"Of course you will refuse," said that lady, in her decided, dogmatic way, "you can easily write and say that you dislike to have your privacy invaded by a number of strangers."

Now, though Colonel Crackenthorpe hated cyclists, there was something he hated with a yet more bitter hatred, and that was the sister-in-law who was at present honouring him with a visit.

Nothing rubbed him so severely the wrong way as the manner in which she invariably tried to settle all his affairs for him, and no arguments in favour of the Secretary's request would have been of so much avail as Aunt Clara's opposition.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he said testily. "As Lucille says, the ruins are one of the sights of the county, and the possession of them entails a sort of public duty. So long as this secretary man can guarantee that they won't go and cut their names on the old trees, or do any of the other idiotic things tourists are given to, I don't mind their coming for once in a way. Connie"—turning to his second daughter—"you can write him a civil note from me and say I consent to their coming."

"Well, I am surprised at you, George," said Aunt Clara, "but surely you will at least impose some restrictions upon them, tell them what part of the ground they may go through, and at what hour the place must be clear of them."

"Nonsense, my dear Clara. If I do a thing at all, I like to do it properly. Tell them to let me know how many are coming, and some refreshments shall be provided for them in the old refectory. I dare say there may be some among them who will be interested in the historical associations of the place."

The girls looked at one another in open-eyed astonishment, and Madge, who was still in the short frock stage of girlhood, clapped her hands and cried out: "What fun! And may we go and see them feed?"

"Madge!" cried her aunt, raising her hands in horror. "How can you dream of such a thing? I think we had better all go out for the day, or shut ourselves up in our rooms."

"There will be no occasion to do that," said the Colonel stiffly, "the cyclists will not come near the house, and if I think fit to take my daughters to see our guests—mind, I do not say I will—but *if* I think fit, I shall certainly do so."

It dawned at last upon Aunt Clara that her interposition had quite a contrary effect from what she intended, so she turned the conversation into another channel, and no more was said upon the subject of the Witheram Cycling Club, which, however, did not drop so speedily out of the mind of one member of the party.

Connie Crackenthorpe had not forgotten the delightful talks she had with the young lawyer she had met when staying at the Hampdens, nor the earnest hope he had expressed that they might meet again soon; a hope that seemed little likely of fulfilment, since Witheram was in the next county, twenty miles from Crackenthorpe Abbey, and the Hampdens only invited her to visit them once a year.

The thought arose in her mind that the eagerness of the Witheram Cycling Club to behold the Crackenthorpe ruins might be prompted by the desire of its secretary to see her, and though she chid herself for the preposterous idea, it still lay under the surface of her thoughts, gladdening her unconsciously, as a hidden warmer under-current enlivens the waters of a stream.

The Witheram Cycling Club were fortunate in their weather when the day fixed for their trip to Crackenthorpe Abbey arrived—a day after a cyclist's own heart, bright, yet fresh and cool.

Arthur Brandon congratulated himself on the success of his bold step in writing to Colonel Crackenthorpe, for he had done it with very little hope of a favourable reply, knowing from report that gentleman's obstinate dislike of the gentle wheel.

He put it down in his heart to the persuasions of the Colonel's fair daughter, not being behind the scenes as the reader is; and the thought that perhaps she too might rejoice at

Digitized by Google

this opportunity of meeting again, lent wings to his feet, so that in the exuberance of his joy he was very nearly being "run in" for scorching on the public high road.

The run to Crackenthorpe passed off without any special incident, and hot and thirsty as the riders were, when they reached the Abbey, the sight of the cold collation spread under the shade of the moss-grown walls was exceedingly welcome.

The Colonel had almost forgotten his idea of going to see his guests, when a chance word from his sister-in-law fanned into flame his love of opposition.

"I'll just go and have a look at them," he said. "Lucille, you come with me."

"Oh, father, I promised to go over and practise archery with Mabel Turnbull," said Lucille, who was as good-natured as she was clever. "Connie might just as well make herself useful for once. She has been mooning about doing nothing all day."

"Well, then Connie, I insist upon your coming," said her father. "I won't listen to any excuses." And Connie went up to put on her hat with dutiful submission—and a heart bounding with delight.

They found the repast in the old refectory on the point of conclusion, and the Colonel, when the "secretary fellow" had been made known to him by his daughter, was much surprised to find him a man of well-bred appearance and perfect manners. "The fellow actually seems to be a gentleman," was his inward comment.

Pleased with the thorough appreciation of his hospitality shown by the club and by the deference of the secretary, the old gentleman actually condescended to go up and inspect the row of obnoxious machines that reposed against a fence, and to ask a few questions about their peculiarities.

Presently one of the owners, an elderly member of the club, came up to adjust something in his machine, and looked at the Colonel closely. Then he approached him, hat in hand.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but surely you must be Master Harry—leastways that used to be Master Harry at Headon House, where I was under-gardener? Don't you remember Bill Thorpe, sir?"

The Colonel turned and looked at him closely. "Of course I do," he cried, "why, Bill, it was you first taught me to handle a gun."

"Aye, sir, I did," said the other with a grin, "and do you remember that day with Farmer Stockem's rabbits?"

"I should think I did. I believe it was the proudest day of my life. And do you remember the trouble we got into about that hen-pheasant? Why, it's like going back to the old days to see you again!" And the two men rambled on into recollections of boyish sports and scrapes they had enjoyed together.

And then Thorpe explained how he had now settled down as market gardener in the little town of Witheram, and had allowed himself this one day's holiday to enjoy his favourite amusement of cycling. And the Colonel recapitulated briefly the succession of deaths that had resulted in making him, the younger son of a small squire, the owner of the large domain of Crackenthorpe Abbey.

Meanwhile, Arthur Brandon, with a culpable neglect of his duties to the club, had managed to get to the side of Connie Crackenthorpe, and almost unconsciously they found their steps straying from the ruins, which the tourists were inspecting at their leisure, into a moss-carpeted glade, where in the sunshine and the stillness, Arthur Brandon found words in which to pour out his tale of love and longing, his hopes and fears, his own unworthiness of such an inestimable treasure.

As he stood there, stumbling through his broken sentences with the unmistakable ring of true sincerity in his voice, his dark eyes aflame with feeling, and his clear-cut, resolute lips trembling with eagerness, he looked a lover of whom any woman might be proud.

And so Connie seemed to think, for though she kept on saying, "No, it could never be, she was sure her father would never consent," her own views on the subject did not transpire, except in so far as her lover could discern them in the soft flush on her cheek, and the shy, happy glance of her blue eyes, and in the fact that she did not withdraw her hands from his eager clasp.

He was urgent to obtain more definite confirmation of his hopes, when the sound of voices close by startled them. They were standing near a clump of elder bushes, and he hastily drew her behind it as the footsteps came nearer.

Down the path that led through the middle of the glade came her father, accompanied by an elderly man trundling his wheel, and talking to him with a familiarity such as very few could have ventured on with the master of Crackenthorpe Abbey.

"And so you really find this cycling enjoyable?" the Colonel was saying.

"I assure you, sir, it's the next best thing to flying. When you have a gentle incline before you and can slip along it without any exertion, why it's heavenly; and as for the difficulties, they just increase the pleasure as soon as you have mastered 'em. You just have a try here, sir, where

He stepped out swiftly, and caught the bicycle with its wobbling rider.

Digitized by Google

there's nobody looking. I'll hold you on just at first. Do 'ee now, Master Harry!"

Whether it was that the revival of old associations roused again in the Colonel's bosom the venturesome feelings of boyhood, or that the habit of obeying this mentor and guide in all matters pertaining to sport, insensibly returned to him, it is impossible to say; but the fact remains that he let himself be persuaded to mount the old man's bicycle, and Connie and Brandon held their breath in astonishment as they saw him zig-zagging about the path in the manner common to beginners, upheld by the stalwart arms of the ex-gardener.

Their glances met in irrespressible amusement, but they dared not move or make a sound, lest the Colonel should discover that this utterly unexpected performance on his part was not without spectators.

Bill Thorpe took him on some way and then turned him back again. "That's famous, Master Harry," he cried. "why, you'd learn it in no time," and up and down they went. "Do you know, I left you quite alone that time and you went on all right?"

"Did I really, Bill?" cried the Colonel, delighted—"leave me alone now, and I'll try."

But, alas! this time self-confidence came to grief, and Colonel Crackenthorpe soon measured his length upon the turf.

"A fall or two at first," said his teacher cheerily, "is all in the day's work." And he had the Colonel up and on the machine again before he had realised his disaster.

The lovers dared not issue from the friendly shelter of the elder, but as this arrangement brought them into very close proximity, Arthur Brandon was nothing loth to be thus detained.

A few more turns and the Colonel, emboldened by success, again insisted upon trying alone. This time he made—or rather his wilful wheel made for a tree close by the elder clump, and Arthur Brandon foresaw that a fall among the gnarled roots was almost inevitable.

He stepped out swiftly and caught the bicycle with its wobbling rider, but he had the tact to appear as apologetic aggressor and not as rescuer.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel Crackenthorpe," he said. "I must have startled you coming out suddenly like that. I thought that to stop you like this was the only way to prevent a collision in which one of us might have been hurt."

The Colonel dismounted and mopped his brow. He *was* startled at the sudden appearance of Brandon on the scene and of his daughter, who now came forward, calm outwardly, but with inward quaking. He looked at them both scrutinisingly, but there was no trace of a smile on either face, so he concluded they had not seen him until just now.

"I did not know," continued Brandon, "that you were cyclist too, and I am delighted to discover the fact."

"Oh!—er—I can't really call myself a cyclist—*yet*; I was only just trying—in fact, it is the first time I have ever been on in my life."

"Really!" said Brandon, "yet you were riding quite alone when I—so nearly ran into you."

"Yes," said the Colonel complacently, "I think I should learn it pretty quickly if I had any one to help me just at first."

"That you would, sir," remarked Thorpe, "and if I had the time to spare I'd gladly come over and help you."

"If you would allow *me*," said Brandon eagerly, "it would be nothing of a ride for me to come over here and help you, and I should consider it a privilege——"

"Oh! I should not like to take up your time," began the Colonel, but Brandon assured him that he would positively enjoy it, and that it was the only return he could make for the Colonel's princely hospitality to the Witheram Club.

"I am wondering what Aunt Clara will say," suggested Connie, with a mischievous glance at her father.

"You little puss!" said the Colonel, who was in high good humour, "don't you tell her a word about it, till I have mastered it, and then we will take her by surprise."

"Would it suit you if I came next Saturday?" inquired Brandon, determined to strike while the iron was hot.

"Do," said the Colonel, "come over to lunch if you can. The ladies will excuse your bicycling costume, I am sure. And, by-the-way, I must get a machine. What kind would you recommend, Thorpe?"

Thorpe, like every other cyclist, had his favourite make, and waxed eloquent upon its merits, and in the enthusiasm of his new departure, Colonel Crackenthorpe walked off with him eagerly discussing details, and leaving the lovers to follow at their leisure.

But Fate, which had befriended Arthur Brandon so conspicuously hitherto, was determined to prevent his getting quite a satisfactory answer from Connie that day.

He had just got again to the same point in his wooing at which he had been interrupted before, when as they emerged from the glade in suspiciously low converse, they suddenly came face to face with Aunt Clara, who had thought it her duty to come and look after her niece, whose father was so culpably careless as to be capable of letting his daughter talk with these common people who were invading the park on wheels.

Her worst fears were realised when she caught sight of the pair, and she hurried Connie off into the house as quickly as possible.

After dinner that night she took her brother-in-law seriously to task.

"Do you know," she began, with an unconscious imitation of Penley in the *Private Secretary*, "I was quite upset to-day by something I saw. I thought your admitting those strange men into the Park was rather rash, but when I met Connie, actually Connie, coming out of a shrubbery path in earnest conversation with the secretary, if gave me quite a turn. Why, it positively looked as if he had been making love to her."

"Pooh, nonsense!" said the Colonel. "I had been with them myself just before. And even if it had been, the man is a gentleman. Bill Thorpe was telling me about him, a well-connected man, and rising in his profession. Really, Connie might do worse."

Aunt Clara had already fully-formed matrimonial projects in her head for her two elder nieces, and she proceeded to argue and to irritate the old man till he was worked up into a thoroughly bad state of temper, when she left him, declaring that she washed her hands of him and his daughters, who would all come to a bad end if he had his way.

She expatiated to his daughters upon the terrible temper he was in, so that when poor Connie received a summons to the study, she entered it in fear and trembling, not knowing what was before her.

It reassured her a little to see what his occupation had been. Various advertisements of cycles, brakes, saddles, pumps, and other accessories, strewed the table. The Colonel had been poring over a handbook on cycling.

"Tell me, Connie," he said, "this young man who is so anxious to help me in riding—is there—is there anything between you?"

Emboldened by his tone Connie took her courage in both hands. "There is nothing, papa—*yet*, but—but he wants there to be something, only—only it depends upon *you*."

"And what is *your* opinion?"

"My opinion," said Connie, laughing and blushing, and pressing her cheek against her father's arm. "My opinion is—that he will make you an excellent teacher of cycling!"

Her father stooped and kissed her lightly on the forehead, pleased with her unwonted caress.

"Well, well, my dear," he said, "we will see. It's not a thing to be decided lightly. I shall have the opportunity now of getting to know the young man."

And so it came to pass that the irrepressible bicycle found its way into Crackenthorpe Abbey, and the Colonel became such an enthusiastic wheelman, that Arthur Brandon gave up the idea he had formed of making his honeymoon journey a cycling trip from the well-founded fear that his father-in-law might insist upon accompanying the bridal pair.

Gilbert Stanhope.

Digitized by Google

The Man Milliner.

A Love Story with the Usual Happy Ending.

My father had never brought me up to work. He had always given me an ample allowance and taught me to consider myself his heir.

My mother was long since dead, and when my only sister a few years back had married a wealthy silk merchant, she had received a handsome dowry, and it had always been understood that that represented her share of my father's fortune and that I was to have the rest.

Now, upon our father's death and within a few weeks of my thirtieth birthday, I found myself confronted, for the first time, with the necessity of earning my own living.

My father had died at a moment when he was heavily involved in speculations of which I knew nothing, and the legacy that should have stood between me and the world was practically worthless.

In a few months, by which time his affairs would be finally settled, there might be a small balance to the good for me, but meanwhile my capital and income alike were meagrely represented by a few hundreds still in hand from my half year's allowance.

My father's sudden and unexpected death was in itself sufficient to have unmanned me, for we had always been the best of friends, but the additional blow which had fallen on me in the loss of my prospects roused me to action, and I wearied my brains puzzling how I might best meet the emergency.

I was staying for the time being with my sister, having received a cordial invitation from her and her husband.

None of the many plans they had proposed to me seemed specially adapted to my capacity, and I was sitting in the drawing-room somewhat dismally discussing my future with my sister whilst she pulled to pieces a very elaborate headstructure, which she declared did not suit her in the least though she owned to its being a very expensive creation by Madame Modiste.

"I don't seem to get it right, somehow, Jack," she said despairingly, after half an hour's wrestling with various bits of chiffon, lace and ribbon. "Just leave off talking of the Gold Coast for a minute and bring your great mind to bear on the subject that occupies my attention. You have excellent taste. Now, tell me, dare I add this bit of pink in the front. It was at the side; is it an improvement here. And what about these flowers? Don't you think a feather is perhaps more becoming to my style of beauty?"

Cis is very pretty; at least I am very fond of her, and I admire her awfully, so I collected my wits and told her to put on the hat.

She did so.

"You're right; it's all wrong for you," I said critically. "It doesn't want pink at all; anyway that's much too deep a colour for you. And you ought to pull down the brim in front a little more. And I tell you what, just take out those flowers and if you've got a feather I'll stick it in for you scientifically just where it wants to go."

Cis jumped up. "I'll fetch you a feather. I've got one I know. Now, don't budge; I won't be a second!"

She ran off and I examined the hat with much interest. It was a large picture hat, but Cis is on an imposing scale and can carry off a good deal in that way. I began to decorate the hat according to my idea; Cis returned in a few minutes with the feather and I showed her where to put it in.

"Why, you've altered the whole thing!" she cried.

"Yes; just pin the things in place; I can't do that part; then put it on and see how it looks."

She proceeded to carry out my instructions, and I watched her operations with some excitement as to result. When she finally tried it on she uttered an exclamation of delight.

"It suits you down to the ground," I said. "Upon my word, I've never seen you look better in anything!"

"Jack! you are clever! I'll have it made up and wear it exactly as it is. It looks just as if it came out of a Bond Street shop."

Her words gave me an inspiration.

"Cis!" I cried, "you've cut the Gordian knot! I know what I'm going to do now. I'll open a bonnet shop."

"A bonnet shop!" she echoed.

"Yes. You say I've got taste. I believe I have. I believe I could plan a hat to suit any face, provided it was not surpassingly ugly. I'll design and group all the hats like I did yours and employ girls to sew them. I shall be the rage, you see. I'll put a fancy name over the shop like they all do. What's the feminine of Jack, Joan? Jennie?"

"Oh!" gasped Cis, "I think it's a splendid idea. I'll put some money in it to give you a good start, and Tom will, too, I know. But you mustn't take refuge behind a woman's name. No! Just write up large 'JACK,' and let everyone know it's managed by a man. It's such a popular name, and the women will flock to the shop. Besides, with those pleading dark eyes of yours, you could make a woman buy anything."

The long and the short of it was that in a few weeks' time I found myself established with a mild flourish of trumpets as a man milliner.

"Jack's" hats were speedily the rage. I made a point of giving each client personal attention wherever possible, and I became the fashion. Need I say more?

One Saturday afternoon my sister and I were having ices in some very smart tea-rooms when she nudged me.

"Jack," she whispered, "I'm certain that's one of your bonnets. It looks like you all over."

I started. It was a simple white straw hat wreathed with forget-me-nots and tied under the chin with pale blue strings, but the face—the face that its broad brim shaded! it was the face of my dreams, tender, delicate, womanly.

Digitized by Google

"Yes," I responded in some confusion, "I remember grouping that very hat, but I didn't make the sale. Miss Perry did last week, I believe. I wonder who the fair client is? I must look her up in the books."

"Why, don't you know," rejoined Cis, "it's Lady Laura Lovel; she was in here yesterday with another girl, and Mrs. Bracebridge pointed her out to me. Oh, Jack, you *are* doing splendidly. Think of the connection you have got already!"

I could not think, I could not reply, I could only look across the room and see as in a mist a fair face with a wealth of clustering pale gold hair wreathed in forget-me-nots.

She lifted her face as we passed. Eyes like the summer sky, a smile of heavenly sweetness, that was the picture that impressed itself on my mind. I repeated over and over again her name, "Lady Laura Lovel! Lady Laura Lovel!" She was far beyond me now, beyond the dreams of nobly ambitious love. In the old days I might have had hope.

When I got home I looked through the books and found an entry of her purchase. Yes, my sister was right; the blue bonnet had found an owner in Lady Laura Lovel. I knew her already by repute as one of the season's belles.

I was not surprised now at the furore she had created nor at the train of wooers she was credited with; I was as madly in love with her myself as any of them could be.

I went then and there out and bought a dozen society journals on the chance of finding some scraps of more or less reliable gossip concerning her. The descriptions of her scarcely tallied with the impression I had received of her delicate, ethereal beauty.

One of the magazines even contained a portrait of her, which I could not at all reconcile with the picture enshrined in my heart. It did not do her justice by any means, in fact could scarcely in my opinion be termed a likeness!

I should never have recognised her from it; her fair hair appeared much darker in the photo which was very misleading, and her features had suffered considerably in the touching-up process. Nevertheless, I carefully cut out the reproduction, kissed it and stowed it away in my pocket-book.

Many, many times during the ensuing week did I condemn myself for my folly, my worse than useless infatuation. For what chance was there for me? I had not even the honour of her acquaintance nor dared seek it. Yet, in spite of my telling myself this over and over again, I rarely now left the show-rooms during the fashionable hours for shopping.

One day whilst I was still building my flimsy castles in the air I was confronted with an announcement in one of the dailies that a marriage had been arranged between Lady Laura Lovel and Major-General Willoughby-Cave and would shortly take place.

My brain reeled; it was all over then! But I would not believe it possible. She was my destiny, my Fate! Assuredly there must be some mistake, the statement would be contradicted later. I would get the early edition of the evening papers presently and see.

I worked through the rest of the morning mechanically. In the afternoon a bevy of lovely young girls came in and clamoured to see "Jack." They would not be put off; they must have his personal and undivided attention.

I came to them and they explained they wanted me to suggest a scheme for bridesmaids' hats. They described their costumes and showed me patterns. One of them remarked: "It's Lady Laura Lovel's wedding, you know."

Her words dashed my last hope to the ground. In the face of such overwhelming evidence to the contrary, I could no longer cling to the belief that a miracle was going to be wrought on my behalf to give me my love.

I tried to rally myself and to study the eager faces round me in order to evolve a curve that should be equally becoming to them all. Finally they went away, delighted with my suggestions and leaving the order with me.

They had not been gone very long and I had retired to my desk, hidden behind a large folding screen, where I was trying to realise the cruel blow that had fallen on me when Miss Perry came up softly and said: "Lady Laura Lovel is here and would much like to see you."

There was no help for it. I must go. I should be face to face with her at last. I did not know whether to be glad or sorry.

Of course directly I saw her my eyes became riveted on her. She wore the same forget-me-not blue bonnet that had emanated from me, and I noticed as in a dream that she was accompanied by a young girl of about her own age. I bowed and addressed myself attentively to her. She hesitated and drew back, and the darker girl leant forward and said rather haughtily:

"I want to choose some hats to complete a trousseau. I don't want colours. Please show me only white and cream."

She was a pretty, graceful girl, nut brown in colouring and her face seemed to strike me as familiar: but I was disappointed to have to concentrate my attention on her as I should have much preferred to listen deferentially to Lady Laura's ideas and fancies.

I found my new client very hard to please and much more disposed to be guided by Lady Laura's opinion than mine. It was not the sort of thing I was accustomed to; however, I did not mind at all in this particular case.

I grouped a picture hat roughly with trails of flowers and leaves composed of hand-painted chiffon, and asked her how she liked it. She seemed pleased with the idea and turned to Lady Laura.

"How do you like it, Amy?" she asked.

"*Amy?*" I queried to myself; "some pet name, I suppose."

"I think it ought to suit you to perfection, Laura," she answered.

This one Laura, the other Amy! Was it a case of mistaken identity, I was asking myself in bewilderment.

Evidently; for the darker beauty decided on the chiffon hat and requested it to be entered to Lady Laura Lovel. I also succeeded in pleasing her with several other designs, and it was arranged between them that *Amy* was to come in in a couple of days time and see what she thought of them.

After that I put everything else aside, even the bridesmaids hats, to get on with the trousseau order. On the day appointed I was quite unnerved with excitement, dying to see *Amy*, and to learn who she was in reality.

Presently Miss Perry put her head round the screen and announced: "Miss Duchesne."

I jumped up; the name of Duchesne was almost an introduction of itself. Before her marriage my mother had been a Miss Duchesne, and I also bore the name among a long string of baptismal ones.

I told Miss Perry to show Miss Duchesne into the best reception-room, and to say that I would wait upon her there.

I did so without delay, and in the long conversation that ensued our talk was not only hats nor even mainly hats.

I learnt the connection Miss Duchesne had with our family which was remote enough truly, but she seemed prepared to accept me as a semi-relation, "having no real ones to call by the name," she said, with a rather plaintive little smile.

Later, when the acquaintance thus begun had ripened under my sister's gentle auspices, Miss Duchesne confided to me that Lady Laura Lovel was an old school-friend of hers in days of former prosperity, and that she had since been very good to her when the wheel of fortune had gone round.

The forget-me-not bonnet had really been purchased by Lady Laura, but she had almost immediately pressed it on Miss Duchesne's acceptance, because her *fiancé* had happened to remark he disliked her in blue. Miss Duchesne herself, she further confided to me, was on the stage, "But I do not think," she finished, with a little sigh, "I shall ever be a success."

"I know one *rôle* in which you would be perfect!" I said.

"What is that?" She lifted her eyes to mine.

"As my wife," I said. "Would you take that part in life? Would it content you to be merely loving and beloved on the world's stage?"

"I think it would," she murmured, "you are such a convincing lover!"

Ellice Beere.

Digitized by Google

A Good Deal of "Pretty."

"Miss Giggleton is pretty plain, isn't she?" "Yes, she is pretty plain, but her younger sister is pretty pretty."

He could be the Sun.

"You are the world to me," he whispered. "All right," she answered; "you can be the sun. I'm going to marry your father."

Troubles would Soon Come.

He: "It would be a pleasure for me to share your troubles and anxieties." She: "But I haven't any." He: "Oh! you will have when we are married."

Must Make Allowances.

Belle: "Would you allow a man to kiss you?" Maude: "Um—well, I think it is our duty to—er—make allowances for the weakness of mankind, you know."

Oscular Demonstration.

Melinda: "Pa, that young man, Mr. Charley, is very fond of kissing." Papa: "How did you find that out, you naughty girl?" Melinda: "I had it from his own lips, pa."

A Plausible Reason.

He: "I have read over a hundred novels during the past year." She: "Indeed! Probably that accounts for it." He: "Accounts for what?" She: "Your ability to talk fiction."

Curiosity Conquered.

Claribel: "You told me you were never going to write to young Hankinson again." Angie: "He's written me a dozen letters I haven't answered, but in his last one he left a page out, and I had to write and ask him what it was about."

A Fight to a Finish.

"Waiter," said a young civil engineer, after vainly struggling with knife and fork for fully ten minutes on an alleged spring chicken, "bring me a chisel, a steel wedge, and a heavy hammer, for I'm interested now, and am determined to see of what material this thing is made."

Winning her Favour.

"I hope you will excuse my delay, Mr. Jones," she said sweetly; "but I must confess I ran up to my room to look into the mirror a moment before seeing you." "That's quite excusable, Miss Fair. A lady with a face so attractive may well be excused for wanting to look at it occasionally." Miss Fair is never out to Mr. Jones when he calls.

Anything to Oblige.

Augustus Edward found his beloved weeping bitterly when he called. On asking the cause she explained: "Ma has no respect for my feelings at all. The servant was giving my sweet pet Fido a ride in the baby carriage, when ma lifted it out by the neck, and put the baby in its place. Wasn't it cruel?" "Aw, it was dreadful, don't-cher-know? Just say the word—aw—and I will lift the baby out by the neck—aw—and replace the dawg!"

Just why he Wanted her.

She: "I don't want to marry you. I don't even want to talk to you!" He (a widower) eagerly: "That's the very reason I want you to marry me!"

Her Only True Love.

He: "Are you sure that I am the only man you ever really and truly loved?" She: "Perfectly sure. I went over the whole list only yesterday."

Caught on the Links.

Beatrice: "You know, Will said he'd like to be caught playing golf?" Patience: "Yes." "Well, I caught him on the links this afternoon. We're engaged."

The Pangs he Felt.

The Sweet Young Thing: "I wonder if you ever felt the pangs of love?" The Savage Bachelor: "I had a deep and abiding love for green apples when I was a small boy."

Very Punctual.

Smith: "Your friend Wheeler is keen on punctuality, isn't he?" Brown: "I should say he is. Why, he even carries his watch in the hip-pocket of his trousers, just to prevent his ever being behind time."

From Bad to Worse.

Harris: "Walters has been looking pretty bad since his daughter got married, hasn't he?" Correll: "Yes; you see, he had no sooner got his daughter off his hands than he found he would have to put her husband on his feet."

Spoiling the Sentiment.

Naomi: "George, I believe that love brings us anguish as well as bliss." "So do I." "Do you ever experience that restlessness, that anxiety, that positive pain, that——?" "Certainly, love." "And what do you think causes it?" "Cucumbers."

Sweetly Filled.

Tommy: "I'se got de toofake, awfully." Visitor: "You should have the tooth filled, Tommy." Tommy: "I did have it filled. That's what makes it ache so." Visitor: "I never heard of such a thing. Did you have it filled with gold?" Tommy: "No; only sweets."

Put his Foot into it.

"Oh, Miss Brown, who was that plain young lady you were out with this afternoon?" "That, sir? That was my sister." "Oh—ah—I beg ten thousand pardons! I ought to have noticed the great resemblance! That is—that is——" Then he wished an earthquake would happen there and then.

A Proposal was Expected.

Mr. Green: "Now, I'm going to tell you something, Ethel. Do you know that last night, at our party, your sister promised to marry me? I hope you'll forgive me for taking her away." Little Ethel: "Forgive you, Mr. Green! Of course, I will. Why, that's what the party was arranged for, you know."

No Chance Now.

"Has George ever hinted that he had thought of you as a possible wife?" asked the anxious mother. "No," replied the girl, a far-away look in her eyes, "and I'm afraid he never will." "Why," said the mother, "I thought——" "It doesn't matter what you thought, mamma, dear," interrupted the daughter. "Only last night he complained of feeling drowsy, and it wasn't nine o'clock."

A New Way of Proposing.

"Edith." "Yes, Tom?" "I—I have a very important question to ask you. And—" "Yes, Tom?" "Now, don't play any sister games on me." "What is your question, Tom?" "I—I—well, the fact is, my name is going to be printed in the paper soon—in the paper, next to the advertisements, don't you know; and I was wondering whether it would be all alone among the deaths, or with yours among the marriages." "Oh, Tom!"

Digitized by Google

Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTER. (*continued*).

"You are not very lucky in getting your birds to hop into your net, Chase!" said Digby Scarlett. "Let me help you. If it is Ivy Strange you want, then I saw her step out of the London train, not half an hour ago. She was not alone, being accompanied by a cavalier in the person of Mr. Jack Maitland!" and he laughed harshly.

"You mean Sir John Maitland, Mr. Scarlett!" replied the detective gravely. "I will go and see Miss Strange."

But Digby Scarlett did not hear him. "Sir John," he snarled; "then the old squire is dead! Don't let that girl marry Sir John, Chase!" he laughed. "Arrest her—anything, rather than let her marry him!"

"Do you want to marry her yourself, sir?" said Gilbert Chase quietly.

The other smiled strangely. "I both wish and intend to! But rather than see her another man's wife, I would put a rope round her neck!" And his mouth grew cruelly vindictive. "I always get my own back—her ladyship—that boy—Heriot——" He stopped suddenly, aware that his tongue was running away with him. "Don't listen to my rot!" he said hastily. "I've been drinking! Go and arrest the girl. And find out when the widow of the late squire intends marrying *again*."

Gilbert Chase looked at him strangely. "I don't fancy Mr. Scarlett, that her ladyship will marry—a *third* time!"

A curious expression crept into the man's eyes—half fear, half joy; as, with another reckless laugh he put his spurs into his horse and galloped away.

Then, breaking into a quick run, the detective presently found himself back at the Manor, inquiring for the elder son of the dead squire, for he could not yet frame the words "Sir John."

He was shown into the library, and two figures stepped forward to receive him. They were Jack Maitland and the girl wanted by the police. There was a pause, then the detective spoke:

"I'm very sorry, sir, to intrude at a time like this, when you are suffering from a bereavement in your family; but the law will not stand still for joy or pain, and it is my disagreeable duty to take your companion away with me!"

"I quite admit the justice of your proceeding, Chase," said the grave voice of Jack Maitland, "and am sure neither of us bear you any ill-will for doing your duty. But," and his hand drew the silent figure of the girl closer to him, with a protecting yet proud gesture, "I must correct you on one point. This lady is not 'Ivy Strange' any longer; she never was 'Ivy Strange'; her real name being Dolores Grant. She has lately changed it to that of Dolores Maitland—my wife. We are both prepared to produce an *alibi* to prove she was in the Manor that night of the murder."

Gilbert Chase was silent from astonishment and chagrin. Astonishment that the secret he was so carefully working out should have been discovered by the girl most interested, and chagrin that instead of effecting a sensational arrest, the "suspect" should have returned voluntarily to give herself up to justice, backed by the presence of her husband.

Her husband! His thoughts suddenly went to another woman—the widow of the late Sir Trevor Maitland! How would she enjoy the situation, he wondered cynically? Did the new Lady Maitland guess who her mother was?

The door opened suddenly, and the wife of the late squire entered. She was dressed in dead black, but the three in the room noticed that she had not seized the chance of making herself alluring in widow's weeds. Her face was colourless, but she held herself with the same old pride as formerly.

FORTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

"I Will Repay."

"I have just learnt that you had returned," she said, addressing herself to Jack. "You were too late to see your father; he was unconscious, so perhaps it is better so! But," and she clenched her white teeth over her lips suddenly, "your brother, little Woolf, is fatally hurt, and the stranger who tried to save him from the motor is also dangerously injured!"

Jack stepped forward, touched by the apathetic expression of her voice.

"Mater! Let me tell you that I have discovered the parentage of—of my wife!" and he drew Ivy proudly forward.

"Your wife!" and her face contracted suddenly as with pain. The eyes of the woman and the girl met; then Lady Maitland turned away.

"Ivy" stepped forward impulsively. "Tell me," she murmured. "May I see the—stranger who tried to save little Woolf? He is—I mean," she said hastily, "I think I may know him."

The detective, a silent watcher of each expression and turn of speech, saw Lady Maitland hesitate, a curious change cross her face, then she said coldly:

"You may come; only do not excite him. It is better so."

Silently she led the way to the room where the stranger lay—a man who was already being looked upon as a hero.

With one fearful glance of terror and apprehension young Lady Maitland flung herself down by the bed of the man.

"Father! Oh, my noble-hearted father!" she moaned. "Don't let me lose you when I have only just found you!"

Moved by a sudden instinct, Jack and the detective had stayed outside the room—only Lady Maitland and the younger woman having entered it.

The man opened his eyes. "Sweetheart, is it you? I am glad you are here. The little boy—who was he?"

"Lady Maitland's only son!" Ivy whispered. "You gave your life for him, and he no longer knows it! Oh, father, father, the pity of it—the pity of it!"

A spasm crossed the man's face. He stroked her hair gently.

"I want to speak to *his* mother—to Lady Maitland! The mother of the boy!"

Filled with a sudden fear, Ivy beckoned the silent woman to the bedside.

"Come! He wants you! Don't turn your back!" she whispered passionately. "He knows you—as I know you—at least play your part worthily—mother!"

The eyes of the woman and the girl met, both haughty, proud, and defiant; but in those of the younger woman a gleam of pity shone.

Digitized by Google

The widowed woman approached the bed, her face as white as the sheets that covered the man lying on it.

"You want to speak to me?" she murmured. "I am here."

He motioned her lower. "I vowed vengeance when I first learnt the treachery of the past," he said, hoarsely. "I have given my life for *your* child, willingly and gladly, poor little chap, but—" and he raised himself in the bed—"how did you treat my daughter? By hounding her down and casting suspicion on her for what she did not do!

"Look back and remember one kindly word or action you bestowed upon the child that was *ours*. When I discovered this at first, I was only bent on killing him—Scarlett—or you, for having forgotten so lightly. But now I see that vengeance has passed into a Higher Hand than mine, and I have done with hate—for He will repay—not one score will be left unpaid. Only a great pity—remains for you—for you are more lonely than I ever was. You will never know the love of a daughter!" and his hand touched the bright tresses of the girl he called child.

A quiver parted the lips of the late Sir Trevor's wife.

"You are right. I am more lonely than you—for I have the memory of a bitter wrong always with me, and the knowledge that I have ruined many lives and lost the boy who was everything to me! And the awful bitterness is," she continued in a deep, trembling voice, "that the hand I had most wounded should have been the one to stretch out salvation to my son! That I should have sinned, to have coals of fire heaped upon my head. Is not that gall and wormwood enough!"

A gentle knock at the door heralded the entrance of Jack and the detective.

Jack bent over the man whose hand he had so recently clasped.

"Mr. Grant, I never expected to find you in this house. I want to tell you something that will make you very happy, I think. Ivy—your Dolores and myself were married two days ago. She is safe, and will always have someone to protect her—and love her!"

The eyes of the dying man brightened.

"But—but that charge!" he murmured.

"We will face that together," Jack answered. "I know it will not hold water when once I speak out what I know. I am afraid of nothing for her but peace and honour."

The detective moved forward gently. "You are Vernon Grant," he said, slowly. "The man who was convicted and found guilty of forgery eighteen years ago?"

The man flushed, and a look of fear shot from his eyes that revealed the uncertainty a once convicted felon always feels in the presence of a man who, by law, has the right to interrogate him.

"I am," he murmured. "Why this question—now?"

"Because it is my painful duty to ask you whether you recognise this lady, known by the title of 'Lady Maitland' for more than fifteen years, as the same person who was your wife at the time of your arrest," said the detective gravely.

The dying man raised his eyes to the impassive face of the woman who stood near his bed. He noted the glint of gold still in her rich hair, the soft curves of her mouth and chin, and the shadow her long lashes cast upon her cheeks.

Above all, he remembered that she had once been his honoured wife, and although a veil had fallen between them for all eternity, she was still the mother of the child who had all his heart's love—and that disgrace brought on her would recoil on the innocent head of their child—the wife now of the new Squire of Melton.

And with the knowledge of all the pain his recognition would cost, the man lied—deliberately and nobly perverted the truth—for the sake of the living.

"No," he said, slowly, "I do not remember ever having seen her ladyship before. She is a stranger to me—quite a stranger, I say. The woman I married died some years ago."

Gilbert Chase crept out of the room, a sense of his own littleness in the presence of so much courage and nobility making him forget his professional instincts.

With a sudden gesture Lady Maitland flung out her hand to the man lying on the bed, exhausted and unseeing. Jack drew his girl-wife aside—a sense of delicacy making them both wish to leave these two souls—the sinned against and the sinner—to speak their last words on this earth.

"Tell me," she murmured, "you forgive me. Tell me I have not lost the privilege of praying for pardon! You will remember my weakness and forget my wrong-doing?"

Their eyes met. And the veil seemed to lift for a breathless second, and husband and wife read each other's souls.

"As I hope to be forgiven, so I forgive!" he murmured "Go in peace!"

Ivy ran to her father's side with a cry, and flung her young arms round him; but she was too late to do more than shower soft, tearful kisses on his hand. The weary, strenuous soul had left the cage in which it had been confined for so long. The author, Vernon Vivyan, had begun a New Book, and the mother and his child looked into each other's eyes as strangers.

"Mother," said the girl, timidly, her voice trembling with tears, "let me take the place of poor little Woolf; let me, in some humble way, be something to you. I know you did not like me before—but then you did not guess!"

"Stop!" the older woman cried. "I will tell you that I did know who you were—later; but I refused to believe it, because I hated the idea. I hated you then—but now," and she smiled bitterly, "you have your revenge. You are the mistress of the Manor—the honoured, courted, and tenderly-loved creature, while I—I seem to carry a blight with me—I bring devastation in my wake to those silly enough to love me!"

The girl caught her fingers hungrily. "Mother, don't spurn me, don't call yourself hard names. I can't bear it. For his sake—the sake of the noble man who belonged to us both—don't revile yourself. Let us both begin together a new life of trust and honour."

The woman put the tender, clinging fingers aside, not roughly but firmly.

"Our ways lie far apart, child. I cannot pretend the farce of knitting my played-out life with that of a girl who is a stranger to me. My affection will be buried with my boy. Besides," she added, a cold smile touching her lips, "you would not be so eager to forgive and forget if you knew everything! *Your* life will be riveting new links, daily, while mine will be snapping off old ones!"

"What can there be that I do not already know now?" cried the girl. "Mother—mother, don't keep me in the outer circle of your confidence. Tell me what can send our lives apart?"

Casting a hasty glance round, Lady Maitland leant forward, and seizing the trembling girl by the shoulders, whispered something in her ear.

The girl's face blanched, and she recoiled in sudden horror.

"No, no! Oh, mother! Not *that!*" she murmured. "Not *that!*" and then she fell, an unconscious heap at the feet of her new-found parent.

FORTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Eleventh Hour.

Two days later Sir Trevor Maitland and Woolf—the "Joseph" of his old age—were laid reverently side by side in the family vault of the Maitlands in Melton Church, and the stranger, who had given his life for the boy, was laid in a neat plot beneath a weeping willow, and on the simple headstone that was afterwards replaced by an imposing marble cross, were the words:

VERNON GRANT,
AUTHOR,
AGED 48.

And underneath—

"*Vengeance is Mine—saith the Lord.*"

The widow of Sir Trevor, Pearl Maitland—the woman whose beauty had brought low so many lives and made waste of so much honourable ambition in those over whom her meretricious beauty had wielded a power more potent than the

Digitized by Google

THE BOND BETWEEN.

deadliest poison — stood alone in her boudoir, a shadowy figure in black, with haunted eyes and quivering mouth.

"That girl—Jack's wife—knows. Will she—will she *use* her knowledge?" she murmured. "It would be a sweet revenge for her to play upon me. In her place I would not hesitate—no, for my nature is lower than that of *his* daughter!"

She rose swiftly, and going to the dressing table looked at herself in the glass with a sadly bitter smile.

"*Your* day is ended; very soon now you will throw up the sponge—and you won't regret it—not one little bit! All the heart to which you could lay claim was buried this morning in the grave of a little boy. Fate has taken him from you, and you have no right to protest. It is your punishment that you should lose the one creature for whom you sold even your chances of salvation. And now it does not matter—nothing matters! And very soon you will not matter."

She smiled again, and drew from the bosom of her dress a small phial. As she looked at it her face grew curiously rigid, and a listening expression flickered into her eyes.

"I must be quick!" she murmured. "They may come now my loved one is buried. There is no reason to defer their errand. But they will be here too late!"

She raised the ominous phial to her lips, but, as she opened her mouth a hand suddenly grasped her wrist, and the bottle fell to the floor. With a startled exclamation she turned an saw the girl she had tried so hard to wrong.

"You here!" she said, harshly. "Cannot you leave me in my downfall while you glory in your new-found happiness? Must I be tortured by your interference even here? Or"—and her eyes contracted suddenly—"have you come to say that—it is too late? That they know? If that is so, then pick up that bottle and let me escape my own way."

"No—no!" the girl said, in a low, sobbing voice—"not that way; you must not. For my sake, mother—for the sake of—of *he* who is gone—don't leave like that."

The woman repulsed her coldly, with a searching glance at the white, tearful face.

"Surely, since you know what I told you the other day, you will agree that *this* way"—with a gesture towards the bottle—"will be preferable to the other!"

A shiver shook the slight frame of the new Sir John Maitland's girl-bride, and she pressed nearer the woman who had wrought so much pain in her young life.

"No, no!" she gasped. "In spite of everything—even what you said—about—that, don't dream of such a wrong, of letting so wild an act crown your despair. You did not know—you must have been mad—when *that* happened."

"Mad!" murmured Lady Maitland quickly. "Yes, I have been mad—and am only just realising how mad, now that I have forfeited all the love I once possessed." She turned harshly upon the girl. "Why don't you go and leave me? I am still entitled to my privacy."

The arms of the girl she had wronged for so long stole round her gently. "I cannot and will not leave you in trouble," she said softly. "Think what *he* would have said had I deserted you in your loneliness. Even with his last breath he shielded you at the expense of a lie; and oh, mother," she cried passionately, "won't you take his place for me? May I not have a little of the love that poor little Woolf had—the right to comfort and shield you."

"You say all this to me?" said the low, tense voice of the older woman, beautiful in her ruin as in her pride of life; "to me, when you know that I did all I could to harm you and throw suspicion on your shoulders?"

"Yes," said Ivy bravely, "because I want your love, mother, to know that the parent for whom I have always yearned will have a little tenderness for me, and let me come into her life, even at the eleventh hour."

A curious light shone in the violet eyes gazing at the face so like her own.

"The eleventh hour!" she murmured—"the eleventh hour! You are right, child! I have reached that hour of my life. It comes to us all—some late in the day, some early—with me it is the mid-day."

"Dear mother," the girl continued, moved by the note of sorrow in the lovely voice. "Won't you kiss me—once—this once—as a mother? Only you"—she went on quickly—"Jack, and myself will know the secret, and we will never divulge it to anyone. I am content to pass as the village foundling so long as my mother acknowledges me when we are alone."

Lady Maitland put her hand out slowly—a sad, mocking smile touching her lips.

"Child, we cannot retrace the path we have once trod! The road I have chosen I must tread alone. But I thank you for the words your generosity has prompted you to say, and ask you to forgive; but, believe me, it is impossible to make such a past as mine, and a future as yours, meet on equal terms."

"Then you refuse——" Ivy began, when Félice, Lady Maitland's French maid, entered the room, looking bewildered and frightened.

"Milady! Milady!" she stammered. "Two *gentilhommes* 'ave sent me to say you are desired *dans le salon*."

The violet eyes flashed for a moment, and the ex-mistress of Maitland Manor grew suddenly very pale. A soft touch on her arm roused her, and she heard Ivy's voice saying:

"We will be there immediately. Felice, you may go."

The door closed, and the two women faced each other with trembling lips.

"You know what this means?" said Sir Trevor's widow slowly.

Ivy wound her arm protectingly around her mother's waist.

"I think I do," she answered, with misty eyes; "but come, mother—for so I will call you for the last time—we will face it together."

A swift gleam of pride shone in her ladyship's eyes.

"I am proud of your courage, Dolores," she said simply, and, bending forward, the lips of mother and child met for the first—the last—time. Then slowly they wended their way downstairs.

In the drawing-room Gilbert Chase and another man rose, as the two stately figures, that might have been those of twin-sisters rather than what the elder detective knew them to be, came into the room.

"Lady Maitland," he said gravely, addressing himself to the woman who had posed as Sir Trevor's wife for nearly sixteen years, "it has transpired, after due inquiry, that the warrant for the arrest of Ivy Strange was wrongfully taken out, her *alibi* having proved successful. But it is my unpleasant and painful duty," he continued slowly, "to inform your ladyship that I hold a new warrant for your arrest, on the charge of being guilty of the murder of the man Mike Holland in the spinny. I must also warn you that anything you say now, may be used in evidence against you."

There was a pause, then, in a curiously even voice, Lady Maitland said:

"Will you give an order for my carriage—I mean," correcting herself with a slight smile, "my step-son, Sir John's carriage, to be ready for me? I am prepared to go!"

A wave of admiration swept over the two men and the silent girl at the wonderful calm of a woman who, in the hour of her defeat, could so gracefully yield to the inevitable.

Gilbert Chase moved to the bell, when a rumble of wheels coming nearer and nearer up the drive, as though tearing on a matter of life and death, arrested his hand.

After a pregnant pause, in which each moment seemed an hour, the door was flung open to admit the young squire and another man, who cried loudly:

"Stop! Stop!"

It was Ernest Heath, and in his hand he waved triumphantly an envelope.

Digitized by Google

FORTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Nemesis.

"Stop!" cried Ernest Heath again. "I have important news to tell you that will prove the absolute innocence of Sir John's wife—Ivy Strange that was"—and he put his hand gently on that of the girl whose story he knew.

"You are mistaken, sir," said Gilbert Chase coolly, "our arrest concerns another lady."

Slowly and with much significance the eyes of the woman who had been a laughing petulant girl when last he saw her as Margaret Heath, his cousin, met those of Ernest Heath, and the disguise fell away with all other pretence, as they recognised each other.

"I do not understand," he said slowly. "This lady—the widow of the late Sir Trevor Maitland—can have no connection with the murdered man in the spinny for I hold the confession of the murderer in my hand."

"What?" cried three voices, those of the two detectives and Ivy—"the confession of the murderer."

Ernest Heath gazed at them gravely. "Yes, the confession not only of the greater charge, but also of a cruel perjury that ruined an innocent man's life; and lastly, a foul attempt to murder by burning the house that contained an enemy!"

A glance of intelligence dawned in the eyes of those standing round. Only the white, tense face of the accused woman remained unmoved, as her gaze rested intently on the man whose words had caused a respite in her fate.

Ernest Heath was speaking quickly to the small crowd that seemed to have grown since he and Sir John had dashed into the room on the heels of justice.

"I had reason to wish to clear the honour of a recently dead friend," he said impressively, "who died giving his life for another, and whose career had been blighted in youth by the man who was his false friend. I possessed a strange gift which I had cultivated in former days, and which I had used sometimes in jest. But, on this occasion, I utilised it on a matter of honour for my friend.

"After much trouble and waiting I obtained an interview with the man I sought, and finding him in a semi-intoxicated condition, very speedily had him under the influence of hypnotism. I gradually drew from him a confession of perjury in a forgery case against the dead Vernon Grant, nearly nineteen years ago; then——" He paused, and his eyes rested on the white, rigid face of the ex-Lady Maitland. "Then I suddenly thought I would sound him on something else, and, under the power of hypnotism and my skilful questioning, he committed to paper a confession that it was *his* hand that had laid the death-trap for the owner of the 'Hollies;' and, lastly—but most importantly—that it was his revolver that had killed the man in the spinny! I left him gradually reviving, and outside I met Sir John on his way to see the man, but prevailed upon him to return with me."

"And his name is?" said Gilbert Chase, loudly, prepared for the answer.

"Digby Scarlett!" replied the other gravely. "This is his confession," and he handed the envelope to the detective, who opened it and read:

"*I, Digby Scarlett, of the 'Rest,' wilfully perjured myself to secure a conviction against Vernon Grant on a charge of forgery, nineteen years ago. He was innocent. I also attempted to burn down the 'Hollies.' And it was my hand that fired the fatal shot that killed the man in the spinny. He interfered with me, and in a rage, before I realised what I was doing, I had shot him in the head. I bent over him to see if he was dead, and, finding he was, I left him there.*"

Gilbert Chase sighed. He understood the meaning of the half-burnt havana now, and realised that if he had pursued

HOLLOWAY'S PILLS
THE FAMOUS HOUSEHOLD REMEDIES.

THE PILLS

have gained their wonderful reputation by sheer force of merit, because every person who uses them recommends them to others. They have positively no equal for thoroughly cleansing the system and putting the liver and kidneys in functional order, without pain or griping. They are the best known remedy for Indigestion, Biliousness, Headache, Dizziness, and the common condition of ill-health, known as "run-down" or "out of sorts." Females of every age find Holloway's Pills an invaluable remedy and aid.

THE OINTMENT

is known throughout the world as positively the best and quickest remedy for Bad Legs, Old Wounds and Sores, and Skin Eruptions of every kind, and should be used in conjunction with the Pills. It is also the speediest remedy for Rheumatism, Lumbago, Pains and Stiffness in the Limbs and Joints, Backache, &c. For pains and Soreness at the Chest, and for Throat and Lung Complaints arising from Cold or Weakness, Holloway's Ointment affords most welcome relief in a very short time.

A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.
AND OINTMENT

Digitized by Google

THE BOND BETWEEN.

his idea then he might have made a sensational capture, and gone up a step in his profession. It was too bad, just when he had imagined he had made a *grand coup* in getting out a warrant for the arrest of Lady Maitland. And yet he could not understand her attitude; it had been such a tacit acknowledgment of guilt, so he thought.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "Of course this confession squashes all other arrests on the head. It has brought the whole affair down to a *prima facie* case."

He looked round the room thoughtfully.

"You will excuse me, ladies and gentlemen; I have an important visit to pay."

As he and his partner left the Manor, Gilbert Chase laughed grimly.

"Well, they say the third time brings luck! But I could eat my hat if her ladyship did not have a very good shot at the man too! So at heart she is as bad as the other. I can guess that the 'interference' of the poor beggar was on behalf of Mr.—now Sir John—Maitland!"

Ivy turned to her husband when the room had emptied:

"Dearest! I am so glad this has happened. I was afraid—afraid, and yet—I felt she could not have done—that!"

Her adoring young husband kissed her tenderly. He did not speak; he was thinking of a look he caught in his stepmother's face as she had left the room.

That evening a woman, heavily cloaked, stood in the churchyard by the family vault of the Maitlands.

"Good-bye!" she said softly. "I am going away for ever; but the memory of this churchyard will be always with me!"

She paused at the new-made grave under the willow.

"Forgive!" she whispered; then moved swiftly on.

At the churchyard-gate a man met her. It was Heriot North.

"I know everything!" he said simply. "I want to apologise that I should have wronged you by thinking——"

"Don't!" she said sharply. "I was a murderess in heart. I went out to kill, only bad marksmanship made me wound instead. But in God's eyes I am the same!"

He came closer. "Is it any use my telling you that in spite of all the past that has gone—the wrong that has been done—I am still devoted to you in heart and soul? May I hope that when time has softened your present hurts, the bond between us may be rivetted into a closer and dearer one than that of shame?"

She shook her head gently.

"I have done with life. In that churchyard I have buried every human desire and hope. From henceforth I will expiate my sin in seeking my peace with God!" She held out her hand. "Good-bye! and forgive me for bringing pain and sorrow to you—you are a noble man, Mr. North!"

His fingers closed on hers, and the chilly contact made him feel that it was already the hand of a dead woman.

"Farewell, and God bless you!" he murmured brokenly. "I shall always remember!"

* * * * *

That night Digby Scarlett sat in his study. The blinds were up, and the moon had risen high in the clear sky.

Presently he rose and walked to the window.

"I don't know," he muttered uneasily, "whether it's imagination or not, but I feel that there is something close to me—something that will soon be upon me, crushing me and making me helpless! I wonder what that chap called for this afternoon! I can't remember him going away!"

He pressed his face to the glass, then started back with a cry.

Two men were walking up to the door, and a certain air about them, sent a sinister thrill through the master of the "Rest," and he knew that the end had come! That his day would soon set!

He went to his desk, and, sitting down, poured out a glass of neat brandy, which he half drank; then, with fierce eyes on the door of the study, he gently pricked his finger under the nail with something. It did not hurt much, and he smiled grimly.

"I am glad I always kept that hemel by me. It has proved my best friend!"

He drained his glass; then, still smiling, with twitching lips, waited for his guests to be announced.

The two men who entered the "Rest," shortly left again, but not with the man they had expected to take away. Again had Fate cheated Gilbert Chase! The third chance had been won by the man who lay, with smiling lips, on the bed in the guest room of the "Rest."

FORTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

In Memory's Garden.

Five years later.

The squire of Melton, Sir John Maitland, looked up from a letter he had read three times.

Outside on the lawn the dainty figure of his wife, the beloved lady of the Manor, played with their son and heir, Vernon Grant Maitland, the pride of Melton; and a smile lit the squire's face as he watched them. Presently he opened the window.

"Sweetheart, come here for a moment!" he called.

Carrying the boy in her arms, Lady Maitland came.

Something in his face told her that he had heard an echo from that past they had fought to forget.

"What is it, Jack?" she said, in a hushed voice, letting the child scramble out of her arms. "Is it about *her?*"

He nodded, and putting his arms round her shoulders, they read together a letter.

"*The Convent of the Sacred Heart,*

"*Amiens, France.*

"*Dear Sir,—At the dying request of one of our revered Sisters, who, after five years of stringent piety, died of consumption, caught from doing the roughest of out-door nursing; we are sending you the inclosed locket, which was round her neck at her death. Sister Margaret was loved by all. Faithfully yours,*

"The Mother Superior."

Together they opened the locket. There were two photos in it, one of a little boy, and the other of a woman in the zenith of imperious beauty.

Tears fell from the eyes of Lady Maitland.

"Oh, Jack!" she whispered, "she has expiated all by this time!"

"Yes," he said gravely. "She has paid the debt."

For a time neither spoke, busy with the ghosts of the past.

"We must show this to Ernest Heath," Jack said presently. "He and Muriel are coming down to stay with us next week."

"Yes," his wife answered. "I am glad Ernest and Muriel fell in love. In spite of his being so much older, they are very happy."

"Agnes isn't," smiled Jack; "she was obliged to bury her broken heart in the management of a home for incurables, where she is certain to keep them 'incurable' out of spite!"

Ivy looked at her son, the light of her life.

"Look, darling!" she said tenderly, with tears gleaming in her eyes. "This is a beautiful lady—mummie loved her!"

"Vernie love booful lady, too," responded the child simply, as he kissed the photograph of the woman.

* * * * *

In a dreary station situated in the plains of India, a man with a bitterly sad face and gray hair works at a desk. He is lonely, obscure; and people wonder at his sudden fall from a brilliant journalist into the plodding editor of a third-rate paper. But the man knows the reason.

On the top of the desk, in a silver frame, is the photo of a woman, strangely beautiful and alluring. And the man would sometimes lift his head from his work, and, looking at the face in the frame, murmur: "You will never forget—and I shall never forget. None knew but ourselves that once we were knit by a Bond of Silence and Shame—the Bond Between!"

The End.

Digitized by Google

FACTS ABOUT CATARRH.

Some interesting facts about the success of the Drouet Method in Catarrh where operations have failed are given in the last **REVIEW OF EAR NOSE, & THROAT DISEASES.** Those who wish to read the details of the cured cases can obtain a free copy of this Medical Journal by addressing The Editor, 10 Marble Arch, London, W.

ESTABLISHED 1851.

BIRKBECK BANK,

Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, London.

2½% DEPOSIT ACCOUNTS repayable on demand. **2½%**

The Birkbeck Almanack, with full particulars, post free
C. A. RAVENSCROFT, *Managing Director.*

RINGS Privately Engagement

LOVE LOCKED Hearts Ring
9ct. Gold 10/6
18ct. Gold 25/-

Cash or Easy Payments. SIGNET or DRESS.

See our Registered Designs CATALOGUE FREE.
MASTERS Ltd.,
157 High Street, RYE.

Icilma

Nature's Remedy for Complexion and Skin Troubles, whether caused by cold, heat, age, irritations or accident. Send 2d. for two sample tubes (different scents) of **Icilma Fluor Cream,** perfect for the Complexion.—Icilma (Dept. 127), 142 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.

The Daily Express

HA'PENNY.

USE BORAX FOR WASHING CLOTHES FOR CLEANSING EVERYTHING
DRY SOAP

Contains nothing that can injure the most delicate fabric, everything to produce white sweet clothes and bright healthy homes, with the minimum of labour.

Tens of thousands of packets are bought every week by housewives the Kingdom over. They know the best.

Try it in your next wash.

At all Grocers and Oilmen in ½-lb. packets—same price as the ordinary washing powders.

By Special Appointment Makers to the King.

The Patent Borax Co. Ltd., Birmingham.

Write for FREE SAMPLE AND NOVELTIES.

Name this Paper and your Grocer.

BORAX STARCH GLAZE IMPROVES ALL STARCH

DEATH TO DIRT!

FREE TRIAL PACKET

on receipt of post-card to Sapon Ltd., Dept. 68, St. Swithin's Chambers, London.

'SAPON' makes Washday Playday.

For Woollens, Silks, Laces, Blouses, Delicate Fabrics, and for all Home Washing.

Digitized by Google

IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Should Boys Propose?

"I AM seventeen and very fond of a girl a year younger," writes GUS. "Should I propose to her now, or do you think we might want to break it off when we grow older?"

* * * * *

Propose, by all means, GUS, if you feel you must. As to the future, well, that will take care of itself. If you remain on the same intimate terms when you are twenty-one, then depend on it, she is the girl for you. If not, then I have no doubt both of you will be well satisfied to break off the engagement by mutual consent.

❦❦❦

Should She Give Him Presents?

"ELSIE" is in a situation, and is very much in love with a young man there. Would it be wrong for her to give him cigars, or cigarettes, as a small gift? "ELSIE" is sixteen, and he is twenty-two.

* * * * *

Well, I think "ELSIE" ought to wait until the young gentleman has shown that he returns her feeling towards him. It is usual for the man to give the presents first, and the girl is not expected to always return them. Now and again some little gift can be given, but it is not usual for them to be too frequent.

❦❦❦

Haunted By a Young Man.

"FOR years," writes SYLVIA (Leeds), "I have been haunted by a certain young man. He travels by the same train, takes the same suburban walks, and often has his tea at the same shop as myself, but I have never formed an acquaintance with him. I don't know that I wanted to, as we have rather grown tired of gaping at each other. However, this year we are staying at Tynemouth, and to my surprise the first person I met on the sands was this young man.

"On seeing me he smiled and raised his hat, and I am afraid, in sheer confusion, I returned the salute. Now, what I want to know is, ought we to have recognised each other, and, on returning home, shall we have to be acquainted with one another?"

* * * * *

I think it is quite natural that he should have saluted you. After all, manners unbend at the seaside, thank goodness, and we lose that foolish reserve that we keep up in towns. You did no harm in returning his bow—I should have done the same. However, let him take the first steps in claiming your acquaintance, and when he speaks to you, be nice and agreeable, and introduce him to your parents. If, on returning home, you see each other as frequently as before, well, if one has to encounter another person everywhere one goes, it is just as well to be on bowing or speaking terms as not.

Is it Love?

"I ACCIDENTALLY became acquainted with a young man," writes "MAIDA," "who was staying here for a week's holiday. We met every day, and he professed to be very happy with me. He came to my home, and met my mother and sisters, and also brought me two very nice presents, and kept me supplied with chocolates. When he left our town, he appeared very upset at parting, and I have since received postcards, letters, and flowers from him. Do you think these attentions mean that he has a regard for me?"

* * * * *

Well, he seems to have done the things a man usually does when he has a regard for a girl. I might even say he has gone beyond the "regard" stage, for his constant attentions to you suggest that he is very far gone indeed. Depend on it, if he is able, he will very soon turn up again, as he has evidently taken more than a mere fancy to you.

❦❦❦

Newspaper as a Co-Respondent.

"I AM annoyed with my husband," writes ETHEL. "We have only been married six months and something has come between us. He has ordered a newspaper to be sent every morning, and instead of talking to me at breakfast, he reads it and never says a word. Besides, he props it up against the cruet stand and uses cross language if anybody removes it."

* * * * *

Poor ETHEL! To have love's young dream shattered so easily and by a newspaper! Well I am afraid that is a very frequent cause of trouble which disturbs sooner or later the happiest of unions. I advise you to get used to it. A man at breakfast time is often more like a bear than anything else, and perhaps it is as well that he should vent his ferocity on the money market or the policy of the Government than on the way the breakfast has been cooked. Let him alone, ETHEL. News, like music, has charms which soothe the savage breast, so don't interfere with it. And if you want a little mild revenge try reading *Short Stories* when he comes home to tea, and see how it works.

❦❦❦

Marrying Beneath Him.

"I AM not engaged," writes ADOLPH, "but think it is more than likely that I shall be very soon—I don't know to whom. What troubles me is this: My people are well connected, and my mother has a positive horror of my marrying beneath me. I have met scores of girls in our own set, but find them affected, cold, and proud. They seem to despise any intimacy with me.

* * * * *

"The trouble is that I have also met a great many girls in a lower social position, and always get on far better with them than with the others. They seem to understand me better. Now, what do you think of this question? Am I the kind of man that ought to marry beneath him?"

* * * * *

ADOLPH's complaint is that of a great many other young men. Girls of a certain social position, certainly, do rather assume an attitude of reserve towards men—that is part of their breeding. Quite naturally, the result is often to drive really eligible fellows either into the society of their own sex entirely, or of girls of a lower social standing. Such girls as the latter often *do* attract men above them by their natural manners and candid speech. And very often they make far better wives. After all, a woman who is a lady at heart, will very soon become one in name if properly cared for, and if ADOLPH should be attracted by a girl beneath him, I cannot see why he should not marry her.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Digitized by Google

THE BOYS' LEADER

WILL APPEAR

Tuesday, September 8.

24 PAGES.

("Pearson's Weekly" Size.)

.....

ONE THOUSAND FREE GIFTS EVERY WEEK.

FREE FOR THE MERE ASKING.

.....

A Complete ½d. Comic Paper will be given away every week with the

BOYS' LEADER.

Digitized by Google

"If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work."
—Henry IV.

Fry's

PURE CONCENTRATED

Cocoa

is one of the few good things you do not tire of; it is WELCOME TO THE PALATE at Breakfast, Lunch, and Supper. Besides being "AN EFFECTIVE STRENGTHENER," its flavour is peculiarly inviting, and the most capricious appetite is gratified by its delightful aroma when properly prepared, and in the words of that eminent authority, Dr. ANDREW WILSON, F.R.S.E., &c., there is

NO BETTER FOOD.

300 GOLD MEDALS AND DIPLOMAS.

Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.